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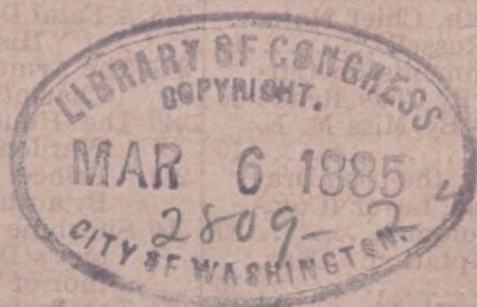
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INTRODUCED TO SOCIETY.

By HAMILTON AÏDÉ.



NEW YORK:
GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,

17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET.

INTRODUCED TO SOCIETY.

CHAPTER I.

SIR NORMAN DAVENPORT, sitting at the "Travelers'," late one afternoon in October, 1881, read the following strange advertisement in the "Morning Post":

"A young lady, possessed of considerable means, who is a stranger in England, is willing to give one-third of her income to the head of a family of position who will introduce her into the best society, and in whose house she may find a comfortable home. Unexceptional references will be given and required. Address, A. B., Post Office, Praed Street, Paddington."

The gentleman who perused and reperused the above through his gold *pince-nez* was tall and upright, and retained such traces of good looks as constitute "a fine man" even at the age of fifty-six. He was scrupulously well dressed, and, with his dyed whiskers and brisk elastic tread, might be taken for forty as one passed him in the street. At this moment, when, having laid down the paper, he shut his eye-glasses with a click and looked out of window, the lines of thought and calculation on his face made him appear fully ten years older. So unprecedented an advertisement as this gave him food for speculation. Was it a hoax? Was it a fraud? Could it possibly be genuine? Supposing the conditions proposed to be made *bonâ fide*, might not this offer him salvation from his present difficulties? He pooh-pooh'd the idea; yet still it recurred with enforced persistence. "Considerable means"—"one-third of her income." What did that mean? Probably a miserable three or four hundred a year. But was it not worth inquiry? Curiosity and desperation alike prompted him to answer this advertisement. It would do no harm to place himself anonymously in communication with the writer. It might—it probably would—end in nothing; but, wrecked as his fortunes were, he felt that he ought not to allow a possible raft of escape to drift past him without at least examining its qualifications and trustworthiness.

After half an hour's deliberation he withdrew to the library, where he composed with some difficulty the following note:

"A baronet of old family, resident, with his wife and family, part of the year in London and part of the year on his estate, would be willing, in consequence of some losses, to entertain A. B.'s proposal, provided that his inquiries concerning her should prove satisfactory, and that the terms she proposes should be such as suited him. Ad-

dress, personally or by letter, with ample particulars, to Messrs. Quicksen & Co., solicitors, Gray's Inn, who will be duly instructed to reply to such application."

He held this note open for two or three minutes, reconsidering before he folded it, and addressed the cover. Even then, after it was stamped, he paused before slipping it into the post-box. How about my lady? Passive as she generally was, there were certain things he knew she would not stand. Would she nip this idea in the very bud, as she had no doubt the power to do? Well, this note pledged him to nothing. It did not even reveal his identity. Time enough to consider further contingencies when Mr. Quicksen should have ferreted out every particular respecting the advertiser. And so he walked off to his lodging in Ryder Street, and dressed for dinner.

He dined with a lady friend of his that night, and took her to a box at the Alhambra. But his evening was not one of undisturbed felicity. The spectacle of his eldest son, whom he believed to be in Paris, seated in a box opposite, between two pretty women, chafed him. "Confound the boy! After all his promises!" Cognate reflections, however, irritating though they were, brought with them reassurance as to the wisdom of the step he had taken that afternoon. His son's recklessness, added to his own extravagance, made a "smash" imminent if something were not done. He disliked looking difficulties in the face. He always avoided doing so, if possible; but they had thrust themselves obtrusively upon him of late, and at last he had taken a step—a singular one it is true—to try and enable him to keep the machinery of domestic life in working order.

I have presented Sir Norman Davenport to the reader in an informal way. Let me supplement this introduction by a few words—just so many as shall render what follows clear—before we proceed further. His estates were in a certain eastern county not far from London, where his family had resided for some generations, and his rent-roll when he entered into possession twenty years since was over ten thousand a year. Four years prior to that, however, his eldest son, Roger, was born; and his father, Sir Giles, who was then alive, re-entailed the estates upon an unborn great-grandson, having a just appreciation of Norman's taste for expenditure and capacity of ruining the family. He had done all he could in this way. The house at Davenport was out of all proportion large for his income. To exercise hospitality there and to have a house in London would have been almost impossible, even without the extraneous expenses in which the baronet indulged. Chiefly owing to Lady Davenport's adroit management, however, Sir Norman had contrived to keep his head just above water until this year. The waves threatened now to close over him. In vain the house in Portman Square was let, two-thirds of the great barrack at Davenport shut up, and one-half the servants discharged. Lady Davenport had exacted these changes, and it was virtually upon her fortune that they now subsisted. But bills kept pouring in—bills of Sir Norman's and bills of the son, Roger's—how were they to be met? Each year the estate was more and more heavily mortgaged; Messrs. Quicksen had declared it was impossible to raise any more money by this means.

I have said that it was chiefly upon Lady Davenport's fortune, which, happily, had been strictly tied up at her marriage and placed in the hands of trustees, that the family now depended. But two children had been born of an union which, after the first three or four years, had been cold and loveless, though no open rupture had ever scandalized society. Lady Davenport's wrongs were pretty generally known, but she was a reticent woman, who eschewed confidences—proud and unimpassioned, as some said; high-minded, long-suffering, and wise, as a few averred.

Sir Norman had formerly been in diplomacy for a few years. He spoke French and Italian well, and was considered an agreeable member of society. Upon all current topics, the most approved opinions that floated to the top of discussion could be skimmed off by listening to him. And in this way he might be said to be useful even to those who preferred original judgments, however incorrect: he was a safe gauge of the mind of the majority. He was a kindly natured man; he had been known to do things which were rightly remembered in his favor whenever his misdeeds were spoken of; and he had done them, as he did most things, graciously and with the best possible manner. This did not prevent his being eminently selfish in the main, and of the laxest principles in more respects than one. He was a gentleman; it was said by his friends that he would never commit a dishonorable act, according to his acceptation of the term; but his wife in her secret heart, and his creditors out of the fullness of theirs, probably expressed a different opinion. Had he been the son of poor parents and compelled to work for his living, a career of self-indulgence, terminating in moral cowardice to face and fight difficulties which thickened yearly, would probably not have corroded an amiable, ease-loving nature. As it was, the material worked upon being soft, produced results even more lamentable to his eldest son than to himself. A culpable indulgence had fostered Roger Davenport's idleness when a boy, and had exercised little restraint upon his vicious tendencies as a man. His nature was less amiable than his father's and his mind less cultivated; but he had more brains, more observation, more capacity to play a part, than his fluent father. He was tall, athletic, and extremely handsome, with an almost feminine softness of voice and manner. These superficial advantages naturally won him a welcome among women; and even among men, who neither saw nor cared to see below the surface, Roger was good to look at and pleasant to listen to. What could one want more?

This son was now Lady Davenport's chief sorrow. She had outlived all other wounds, which, like certain bodily hurts, cruelly painful at first, were healed over, and were only still capable at times of causing a sharp shooting pang. Even Sir Norman's moneyed embarrassments were matters of secondary concern to her compared with the deterioration in her favorite son, and the moral ruin which she saw impended over him. She was a woman incapable of adapting herself to circumstances, of shutting her eyes to evil, and of glossing over what she disapproved; too truthful not to appear repellent occasionally; and possessed of only just that amount of tact which kept her silent where remonstrance would have been in vain. And yet a little more expansiveness, leavened with worldly wisdom,

might have given her an influence denied to silent endurance, and, while exacting in return some measure of her husband's and her son's confidence, have kept them—or at all events Sir Norman—from certain difficulties. As it was, their relations were those of a scape-grace boy toward a mild though frigid governess. He never consulted, he never confided in his wife, until concealment was no longer possible. She rarely interfered or proffered advice, and thus, though she stood very much in the light of a Conscience to him—his own having long been disregarded—she exercised but little influence over his conduct, and till circumstances dragged him before that impartial Bar, he avoided an appeal to it. I have said that Lady Davenport was a woman incapable of adapting herself to circumstances; and it is an apparent contradiction in terms to state that, hampered as she was by her husband's debts and her eldest son's frequent applications to her for money, she kept her house-books with rigid exactitude and curtailed every needless expense. Sir Norman, however, liked good living, and affected the society of certain persons whom Lady Davenport refused to receive. There were not wanting those who said she would have been wiser not to have discharged an excellent cook, and to have invited her husband's friends, whether she liked them or not. But when it was a question of what she believed to be right she was uncompromising. More than a year ago she had insisted upon shutting up the greater part of Davenport; and until she had paid every Christmas bill she turned a deaf ear to all Roger's solicitations for money. For his sake, had it been justifiable to entertain in the present state of their affairs, she would have done so, in the hope of bringing him gradually to frequent some other society than the fast set in which he lived. This was out of the question, however; and the consistent result of the inability to receive "the county," was that Lady Davenport declined all invitations. And here, at least, was little or no sacrifice. Lady Davenport, even as a young woman, had never cared much for society. Though handsome, intelligent, and well-read, she had never shone in conversation, nor ever been a popular woman; and she knew it. This probably had affected her formerly by reason of its influence on Sir Norman, who was one of those husbands who values what he possesses very much at the price the world sets upon it. But of late years she had been indifferent to such considerations. Her life was too full of anxiety, and the difficulties she had to contend with were too serious and manifold, for her to evince more than a feeble interest in matters unconnected with her family. The few neighbors who called at Davenport from time to time, if they were admitted, came away saying that Lady Davenport's coldness and apathy had increased so terribly that they really almost forgave Sir Norman his delinquencies. He would have been so different with a different wife!

CHAPTER II.

Soon after breakfast the next day Mr. Quicksen received a visit from Sir Norman Davenport.

To open the subject which now engrossed his thoughts to his solicitor might have embarrassed many men, but the baronet's inter-

views with Mr. Quicksen had been too frequent of late, and their nature generally of too painful a character, to admit of the client's feeling any difficulty or hesitation in explaining the case to his legal adviser.

Not a muscle of Mr. Quicksen's face moved as the advertisement was laid before him; no expression of surprise escaped his lips; he made a few pencil-notes, and without hazarding comment or counsel, dismissed Sir Norman, promising to let him hear as soon as he had aught to communicate.

Three days later a note summoned the baronet to Gray's Inn.

"I have seen the lady," began Mr. Quicksen, "and I have also had an interview with her solicitors, Messrs. Braggett—a respectable firm, well known to me. The result is satisfactory, so far as the verification of the statement that the advertiser, Miss Catherine Johnstone, has a very considerable fortune, partly in the funds, partly in the mercantile house her father established at Melbourne, which is now carried on by a Mr. Grogan, and partly in land and house property there."

"Indeed? This is very interesting—very curious. And what do they call her income, pray?"

"They estimate it at twelve thousand a year; at least, four thousand a year is what Miss Johnstone is prepared to give, I understand."

"God bless my soul! You don't mean that, eh?"

"She is the only child of a man who went out to Melbourne more than fifty years ago," continued the solicitor, regardless of the interrogation. "He was respectably connected, and very shrewd. He married a woman with some money, and by his own exertions and cleverness, succeeded in amassing this large fortune before his death, which took place last year. Miss Johnstone came to England about six months ago to some relations, with whom she is now staying. But I gather that she is not quite comfortable there, and desires to make a home for herself, where she will be more independent and enjoy social advantages which she can not have at her aunt's."

"What is she like, eh?" asked Sir Norman, eagerly. "You saw her? She is a fright, I suppose?"

"No; she is a fine up-standing young woman, not exactly handsome, but not ill-favored by any means, and with a very intelligent face."

"Ah! I don't care about intelligent women," murmured the baronet. "What sort of manner? Dreadfully vulgar, I'm afraid, with a colonial education?"

A slightly sarcastic smile curled the corner of Mr. Quicksen's lip as he replied:

"Perhaps I'm not a judge, Sir Norman; but I should say her manners were as good as those of many who have enjoyed the advantage of an English training and a fashionable London career. I am told that no expense was spared on her education. She had the best governess from England that money could procure; and, from the little conversation I had with her, I take it the only thing she is quite ignorant of is society. She frankly avowed this ignorance; and it is clear that her curiosity upon a subject of which she knows nothing but through novels has led to her taking this unusual step."

"Well, all this sounds very satisfactory, Quicksen."

"Yes; so far as the young lady is concerned, I think—"

"By the bye," interrupted the baronet, "how old is she? Did you find out?"

"About three-and-twenty. I was going to say that, though all my inquiries touching Miss Johnstone have been satisfactory, you must not be too sanguine as to the result, Sir Norman. I found the young lady to be very shrewd, very particular, and fully alive to the value of her proposal."

"Very particular? God bless my soul! I should think my position and Lady Davenport's character were enough for her. *Dieu de Dieu*. What does the woman want?"

The lawyer raised his eyebrows almost imperceptibly at the innocence of this inquiry. His reply was an indirect one.

"She dismissed me, saying that she had several other applications, in consequence of her advertisement, and that before seeing you she should wish to make further inquiries touching your family and—other matters."

Sir Norman Davenport looked as he very rarely did, annoyed, perplexed, and a little abashed.

"Is there anything to be done?" he said at last. "What do you advise? If she hears of my difficulties I suppose it is all up?"

"Perhaps so—I can't say," returned Mr. Quicksen dryly.

"There is one thing that might determine Miss Johnstone favorably, but that may be difficult for you to accomplish. If you could persuade Lady Davenport to come up to London and call upon her, it is possible that her ladyship might achieve what neither you nor I could do."

"I'm afraid—I'm sadly afraid. You know she is so difficult to—to manage, Quicksen, in certain things. I haven't said a word to her about this as yet. If all the preliminaries were settled I think I could bring her round to the idea, but to get her to move *herself* in the matter—I'm afraid she won't. However, I can but try."

"You will do well, Sir Norman. If I understand the young lady, Lady Davenport might clinch the matter, whereas your visit might possibly do more harm than good. Miss Johnstone is exceedingly sharp. Knowing—as she is sure to know—something of your antecedents and present circumstances, she might decline to become a member of your household, unless reassured by Lady Davenport herself. You will excuse my speaking plainly, but that is how I feel about the matter."

This is why Sir Norman telegraphed to Davenport an hour later announcing his arrival that evening, and actually appeared there in time for dinner. Lady Davenport was quite aware that there must be some urgent reason for this unexpected return; but as long as the younger son, Malcolm, and his tutor, Mr. Holroyd, were present, nothing was said; and even when the husband and wife were left alone, later in the evening, she followed her old tactics, and abstained from asking any questions which Sir Norman might shrink from answering.

In truth, he was far more fidgety than she was; but some time elapsed before he could screw up his courage to attack the subject, which,

he had a prescience, would be unwelcome to my lady. At last he said:

"I have been thinking seriously, Eliza, of the impossibility of living on as we are, with Roger's extravagance, and Malcolm's education, and—so on. And a means has been suggested to me by which we might more than double our present miserable income, if—if you'll only consent to it."

He paused; and Lady Davenport, who was too well schooled by this time to express, or indeed to feel, surprise at most things, for once betrayed in her faded handsome face the curiosity these words had roused.

"What is it?" she asked, rather more quickly than usual.

Sir Norman's words had a way of playing round the exact truth. They were so near it as always to be able to take refuge there when attacked; but they sometimes concealed what they were so close to. It will have been observed that he spoke of "a means that had been suggested" to him. He now, with a similar euphuism, replied:

"I have heard of a girl with a very large fortune who has lately arrived from Australia. She wants a home."

Lady Davenport said, without a moment's hesitation:

"You are thinking of Roger, but I can not hear of it. He must not marry till he is steadier, and till he becomes really attached to some one. A mercenary marriage would—"

"You mistake me entirely. Roger never entered my head. No. This girl—her name is Johnstone—wants to be introduced into society; her object is to be admitted into a family where this can be done, and she offers to give four thousand a year. The idea is peculiar—runs counter to all your prejudices, of course. But, after all, would it not be a very satisfactory arrangement for us?"

Lady Davenport's eyes were riveted upon her husband's face. After a moment's silence, she said coldly:

"I do not think our family is one into which it is desirable, either for her or for *ourselves*, that a stranger, a young woman whom I know nothing of, should be introduced."

"That is just it—that is just what I was coming to," returned Sir Norman, seizing the opening which this reply afforded him. "I should wish you to know her, I should wish you to form an opinion of her from a personal interview, before anything was decided. I have not seen the girl myself; I have only Quicksen's account of her to guide me." And he then, with tolerable fidelity, repeated what the solicitor had said.

"It would alter the whole course of my life," said Lady Davenport, when he had done. "I should have to entertain, and take the girl into society. Otherwise, of course, it would be receiving her under false pretenses."

"And why shouldn't we entertain, Eliza? This house is so confoundedly dull, no wonder Roger never comes here when he can help it. *Il s'ennuie, tout bonnement*. Haven't you deplored to me a hundred times that there is no attraction here for the boy? Why, besides his finding a decent cook, we might then give him a hunter, and I could get up the shooting again, and—"

"I hardly suppose that those are the advantages Miss Johnstone expects to enjoy for her four thousand a year," interrupted the lady,

with that firm mildness which usually acted as a cork upon the aerated waters of Sir Norman's eloquence. Not so on this occasion, however.

"You forget that she would find her life here very dull without young men, and young men won't come here unless they have some amusement. They would find it a 'seccatura.' We might resume in some degree our position in the county. It would be of advantage to Roger in more ways than one."

Lady Davenport remained silent for several minutes. She did not look at Sir Norman again; her eyes were fixed upon the wood-embers. She could not deny that there was truth and common sense in what he had said, and she would never allow her own prejudice to decide this matter. However distasteful to herself, she would do what was right, if she could only determine what that was. The curious proposal suddenly presented to her mind offered, apparently, an easy escape from many pressing and painful difficulties. But would it, in reality, be easy to work out this scheme conscientiously? Would not the position of any girl, or at all events of most girls, be dangerous in this strangely constituted household? Was she justified in undertaking duties she might not be able to perform, and in admitting any outsider to so intimate a knowledge of her anxieties as could hardly fail to result from carrying such an idea as this into execution? And yet, painful as it might be, if her other doubts could be favorably resolved, she told herself it would be wrong to reject such means of salvation as this held out in their present straits. She would see the girl; yes, so far she would yield, and would be guided by her impression of Miss Johnstone as to whether she was a person who might prudently be permitted to enter the precincts of Davenport as a member of the family circle.

"I will go up to London if you wish it," she said at last, "and call on Miss Johnstone. But is she prepared for my visit?"

"Not yet, certainly," replied the astute Sir Norman. "I would do nothing without consulting you—except pave the way by Quicksen's inquiries. All further advances now had better come from you. If you will write a line to-morrow appointing an hour when you could call on her the next day, and asking for an answer to be addressed to me at the Carlton, you could go up to town in the morning and return in the afternoon."

"Understand, Norman, I should wish to see the girl alone, and I can promise nothing till I have had some conversation with her. It is a serious responsibility, which I will not undertake till I have well weighed the matter in my mind after this visit."

"Certainly, my dear, certainly. If the girl is horribly vulgar, of course I can't expect you to drag her about. But I have thought of one thing which is a fortunate coincidence. We have some distant cousins, you know, named Johnstone. There is no reason why she should not belong to that family."

"I do not see how that affects the question," returned the lady, calmly. "I never heard of the Johnstones you mention; but even if she turned out to be a connection, I should object to her becoming an inmate of this house unless she appeared to me to be a desirable person."

Sir Norman abstained from pursuing his suggestion further; it

might serve his purpose in public, but to influence the wife of his bosom it was powerless.

The reply to Lady Davenport's note was a simple intimation, written in a clear bold hand, that Miss Johnstone would be at home at the hour Lady Davenport had appointed. It awaited Sir Norman at the Carlton on the morning in question, and his wife, promising to call for him on her return, drove straight from there to Aberdeen Terrace, revolving in her mind how she could best attain an insight into the stranger's character and tastes.

Before the women confront each other, let me try and paint this one. A tall, slight figure, which her friends called "distinguished," and Sir Norman's "angular." A profile which would be perfectly classical were it not for the straightness of the chin. A countenance not wanting in expression by reason of the hazel eyes, whose gaze was both intent and direct, but possessing little play of feature, and no empty grace of summer-lightning smiles. Indeed, her face showed nothing that she did not feel, though much that she felt could not be read there. Her manner, in its unaffected dignity, would have been admirably typical of an English lady of condition had it been irradiated by a little more warmth. As it was, a nature neither expansive nor buoyant had been depressed by a long course of secret troubles, and, though she never gave expression to these, the effect they produced on her was involuntarily chilling in her intercourse with strangers. She was never otherwise than kind and courteous; she impressed a close observer as an upright and possibly a clever woman, but her pallid, beautiful face and unemotional manner checked rather than invited sympathy.

She was dressed on this occasion, as she always was now, very quietly and at no great expense, but the taste that had selected and arranged her toilet was perfect. Mrs. Archibald Johnstone, flattening her red face against the dining-room window in Aberdeen Terrace to see "her ladyship" step out of her hansom, observed that there were no velvet trimmings nor rich fringes on the dress, whose delicate harmonies of steel and ash-color, she was unable to appreciate. The long, narrow foot, in its neatly-fitting boot, was equally lost upon her. She was looking for bracelets and châtelaines, and lo! they were not.

A dirth youth, struggling into his livery coat as he answered the bell, showed the visitor into the drawing-room, where Miss Johnstone sat alone, waiting to receive her.

CHAPTER III.

THE young lady rose as the door opened, and advanced to meet her visitor.

She was above the middle height of women, though fully an inch shorter than Lady Davenport, and of a more robust build. Her figure was well-balanced and compact, and her movements unconstrained, but too abrupt to be graceful. She had a fresh, sometimes too fresh a color, clear brown eyes of no particular beauty, and perfect teeth. Her hair, which was dark and thick, was cut short, and manifested an independence of action in its waves and clusters.

The brow beneath was broad and well developed, the nose neither impertinently upturned nor arrogantly beaked, but a compromise which, if not classically symmetrical, at least formed no blot on a face the general impression of which was decidedly agreeable. Few who watched it could doubt that its possessor was an unusually intelligent woman, keenly observant of all around her, the main characteristic of whose mind, as of her body, was health and activity. It is a pleasure to look at any living thing with a strong capacity for enjoyment; and the girl's quick, eager glance, her bright smile, her rapid step, and frank outstretched hand, betokened a superabundance of vital force.

Lady Davenport, looking into her face as she took Miss Johnstone's hand, liked what she read there; but, glancing down at the girl's dress, could hardly repress a shudder. It was costly, but its fierce contrasts struck the refined woman of the world like a discordant note in the harmony of her new acquaintance's aspect. What demon had inspired those combinations of verdigris and magenta? Alas! what loud self-assertion might one not look for from the complacent wearer of such virulent and aggressive decoration?

"You have come to see what I am like," began the girl, smiling. "You behold in me an outer barbarian, Lady Davenport, quite ignorant of civilized life, but very curious about it. I suppose you can't imagine any one like that?"

"I have never yet known any one exactly in your position," replied her visitor, with a little hesitation. "But I think I can understand, in some measure, your feelings—and wishes. Do you mind telling me what your education has been, and something about yourself?"

"It can all be told in a few words. My mother died when I was a child. We lived very far from any town, on a big farm of my father's. He had his business in Melbourne, and was a great deal there; but I never lived in a town until two years ago. I was brought up, without companions of any kind, by a very clever governess, whom I hated. If it wasn't for that, I ought to be a prodigy of learning; and if it wasn't that I am fond of reading, I should be a fool. My father meant to bring me to England two years ago. He wound up all his affairs in the country, and we went into Melbourne, meaning to stay only a few months; but he fell ill. We remained there more than a year, and finally he died. Then I came over here to my relations."

Lady Davenport paused a moment or two before she said, in her clear, distinct voice:

"You will pardon me for asking why you wish to leave them and seek a home among strangers?"

Miss Johnstone did not seem the least disconcerted. "Because I have no affection for them, to begin with. Of course, they were all virtually strangers to me when I landed in England six months ago. Then they lead a very stupid life; and I want to see something of society—the society I have read about in novels. Perhaps I sha'n't like it—I dare say not. But it's worth trying—don't you think so?"

"I am afraid I do not," replied Lady Davenport quietly.

"Why?"

"You would hardly understand me if I told you—and you might think me impertinent, Miss Johnstone."

"No, I sha'n't. Please say what you think."

"I see no advantage in a girl going out of her natural sphere of society. If she is rich, the risk for her ultimate happiness is even greater than if she is poor. In either case, she is likely to become dissatisfied, and to attach undue importance to things which—as to real happiness—are worth nothing. A girl so placed, in her choice for life, is likely to undervalue some gem, because it is poorly set, and to choose pinchbeck I am afraid."

"But if she sees no gems? If all is pinchbeck around her, is it not better than she should judge for herself what a wider sphere affords? At all events, I shall never rest satisfied till I have tried. My curiosity is insatiable; as you will find, Lady Davenport, if you ever get to know me well. You have no daughters, I think?"

"No; I have none."

"I am glad of that. I have known so few girls, that I never know what to say to them. I get on much better with men. You have two sons, haven't you?"

Lady Davenport felt like a snail that is touched; she involuntarily shrunk into her shell of reserve.

"The eldest is seldom with us—the youngest is a mere boy at home with his tutor."

Miss Johnstone looked slightly disappointed.

"Oh! There is a dowager viscountess has answered my advertisement; but she has a daughter, and lives in a small house in Belgravia. You have a fine large place in the country, I am told, where I should be able to ride about by myself; as well as a house in London?"

"Our London house is let at present. If you were with us, we should come here for the season; otherwise, we can not afford it."

"You are very frank," said the girl smiling. "Do you know that the dowager (I suppose I oughtn't to betray her name?) pretends it is purely from philanthropic motives she consents to receive me, and that it will cause her great inconvenience. Isn't that amusing? Though I am a savage, I am not an absolute fool."

Lady Davenport smiled, ever so faintly.

"I shall certainly not conceal that the terms proposed alone tempt Sir Norman and myself to entertain the idea of receiving you, Miss Johnstone. I wish you perfectly to understand our position. We have been obliged to retrench, owing to various causes. Sir Norman naturally wishes to return to our old manner of life—to entertain in the country, and pass the season in London. Personally, I had rather continue to live as we are doing—but that is of no moment. If you live with us, it will of course become a duty to gather society around us again, both here and at Davenport. But I can not promise that you will find our house very lively. There are times when you would be very much alone; and I am afraid I should be but a dull companion for a girl."

"I think I shall like you, if you will let me," returned the girl, with more softness than she had yet shown. "You impress me as being a real lady—there is no pretense about you. There was about the dowager. She called on me yesterday, and I saw at once she

was a humbug. I am not afraid of being dull with you. I am used to being a good deal alone."

Lady Davenport stayed half an hour longer; leading the girl to converse upon a variety of subjects which should indicate the natural bent of her mind, and what principles and opinions she held. But though Miss Johnstone was frank enough in the enunciation of her sentiments, the elder lady found herself quite as much questioned, in her turn. The result left Lady Davenport with an interest and curiosity concerning the girl for which she could hardly account. It was a character—produced partly no doubt by circumstances—with which she had never come into contact. Its candor and uprightness were patent: its discretion was open to doubt: its boldness, amounting almost to audacity, offended the good taste of one so conventionally bred; but the girl's perceptions being quick, it was natural to expect that this might be corrected.

Before she rose to depart, Lady Davenport said, with more warmth and emphasis than had characterized her utterances hitherto,

"If you decide upon coming to us, Miss Johnstone, I can not but feel that something of the responsibility of a mother will rest upon my shoulders. This may not be what you wish or intend, but, nevertheless, I feel it would be so. I should not like to undertake this charge, unless you will grant me full liberty of speech to advise, or to remonstrate with you, should I see occasion to do so."

"You shall have full liberty to say what you like, Lady Davenport. I shall feel obliged to you for speaking, and I think I can promise obedience in all that concerns decorum in society; I am so ignorant of its unwritten laws. As to what concerns myself, personally"—here she paused a moment—"perhaps I may be obstinate; but at all events, I shall take whatever you say in good part."

"You reserve your freedom of action—and so must I," returned the other, very quietly. "Circumstances may arise, in which I could only say, 'I wish you not to do so and so.' Should you decline to follow my advice, you must not be surprised, or think it unkind, if I ask you to seek another home."

Miss Johnstone looked straight into her visitor's eyes.

"I don't think you'll turn me out of the house," she said, smiling. And thus they parted.

Lady Davenport picked Sir Norman up at the Carlton. To his eager inquiries, she replied,

"I am not afraid. The girl is a singular character, but she is honest and outspoken. She is clever, too. I think we shall get on. She wants to see the world that she has read of—for she has read a great deal—and she knows that her money will enable her to do this. It is the curiosity of a child: there is nothing vulgar or pretentious about her—except her dress—and that I hope to reform."

"I'm glad it's no worse," laughed Sir Norman, with a lightened heart; for he had dreaded my lady's *ultimatum*. "I'll call on her to-morrow," he added, as he handed his wife into the train at Charing Cross, and then returned to his club, where he played a rubber of whist before dinner.

And his visit the following day added yet further to his satisfaction. Miss Johnstone's bright appearance pleased him; her clear ringing laugh, and the sense of humor which her playful repartee

displayed; above all, her apparent appreciation of his conversational powers, fairly charmed Sir Norman. He was very transparently vain, he liked to believe that he could fascinate any woman. And to say the truth, he really amused the girl. She had never seen any one the least like this loquacious, middle-aged dandy, so gallant, so full of protestation, taking life so lightly, and coloring its responsibilities, as he did his gray hairs, with the sunny tint of sanguine adolescence.

"I have bought a carriage and a pair of horses to drive myself," she said, toward the end of the visit, "and I shall want you to help me buy a couple of riding-horses. You will have to keep these for me, besides a groom to ride with me, and a footman of my own."

"Certainly, certainly—*ça va sans dire*."

"Oh, but I think it so much better to say what I want now. I am not a very good woman of business, though you might fancy so; but I am very straightforward. As I know nothing about expenses in England, I wish to pay for everything in a lump sum. This will be a thousand pounds, quarterly. I suppose my solicitor told yours that?"

"He—he said something like it, I believe," rejoined Sir Norman, with the air of one to whom such details were entirely immaterial. Then he added, with effusion, "Pray believe that you have only to name your wishes, now or later, and whatever they are I shall do my utmost to carry them out."

"That is much more than Lady Davenport promised," laughed Miss Johnstone, "and I believe I trust her more than I do you, Sir Norman."

"Ah! That is cruel. I assure you I look forward to your living with us with the liveliest pleasure. I hope you will soon get to consider yourself quite one of the family. And that reminds me," he added, with his most ingratiating smile, "that I have connections of your name. There is no reason in the world why you should not be a cousin, and if you will allow me, I shall call you so."

"Don't you think it would be better to ascertain if it is true first?" she said, with a twinkle in her brown eyes. "I feel sure, if I was connected with a baronet, I should have heard of it."

"Oh! it is distant, of course—very distant—but I shall take it for granted that it is so."

Miss Johnstone was desirous to be installed at Davenport as soon as the preliminary arrangements could be completed; but it was the middle of November before the household and the stables were properly appointed, and that portion of the house which had been shut up for two years, aired, swept and garnished, to receive guests. Sir Norman's sister, Lady Retford, and one or two others, were to arrive about the same time as Miss Johnstone; but a much larger party was bidden to Davenport at Christmas. Lady Davenport had consented to be a Patroness of a County Ball at C—— in January. The neighborhood could talk of little else than these astounding facts: Davenport opening its doors once more, and its exclusive "*Châtelaine*" coming forward to promote public festivities!

The appearance of a florid, well-made young woman, riding a thorough-bred bay mare at the Meet one bright November morning

accompanied by Sir Norman, was the crowning subject of curiosity; though ultimately accepted as the solution of this riddle.

CHAPTER IV.

THE time is now come for me to speak of two other members of the Davenport household to whom I have hitherto only alluded.

There was six years' difference in age between Roger and his brother. Malcolm was a delicate, and somewhat effeminate youth of eighteen, with a natural taste for music and drawing, which had been subjected to no severe training, and was fed upon the unhealthy food provided for the weakly at exhibitions and concerts, in angular limbs, and harsh, unmelodic progression. It was difficult to believe in the sincerity of the boy's enthusiasms: there was an element of ridicule in his manner of proclaiming them; but he was not stupid, for all that. One did not feel quite sure that he did not court the ridicule, of a set purpose. His health and general inaptitude to fight and face the various dangers of a public school had caused his removal from Eton two years previously. Since that time he had been pursuing his studies at home, under Mr. Holroyd, a tutor of no ordinary character, for whom Lady Davenport had the highest respect, and in whom she placed unbounded confidence. This arose from the fact that he had held the same position toward Roger five years previously, when the boy was nineteen, and, it was hoped, would pass his examination for diplomacy. He had left Eton a year, had been to a "crammer's," where he had done nothing, and was living at home when Holroyd undertook the task of teaching him. But, at the expiration of six months, the tutor resigned his post.

"I can not make your son work," he had said, "and I feel that I am unable to obtain any moral influence over him. I will rob you no longer. You give me a large salary. I decline to continue taking it, if I can do no good."

To all the mother's entreaties he had turned a deaf ear. She was grieved: but her respect for the man increased fourfold. He had been tutor to one of the Austrian Archdukes after this, for nearly four years. It was a fortunate coincidence that left him free just at the time that Malcolm quitted Eton. Lady Davenport had written to beg him to accept the trust of her younger boy; and, after a little hesitation, he had consented to do so.

Philip Holroyd was now forty; and his early training and varied experiences had no doubt gone to form his character. The only son of an English officer of small means, married to a Frenchwoman of an old Legitimist family, he was born in Paris, and educated at the Charterhouse. At his father's death, which occurred when he was sixteen, his mother removed him from school. He joined her at Gratz, whither she had followed the fortunes of her friend, the Duchesse de Berri. Philip was placed at the University of Bonn for two years, after which he entered an Austrian cavalry regiment. He was a capital officer, rode well, and was an expert swordsman; but his passions were undisciplined, and he was involved in more than one quarrel which ended in a duel. Nor was this all. In an

evil hour he was tempted, in the monotony of country quarters, to lose a considerable sum of money at play. To discharge this debt of honor, he had, in shame and anguish of heart, to apply to his mother, whose straitened means could ill afford the demand. This was the turning-point of his life. He made a solemn resolve to redeem the past; to abjure the follies of youth; and to devote his abilities to some pursuit which should enable him to repay his mother, and support her declining years. He left the army and kept the self-imposed vow. His knowledge of military tactics, his reputation as an officer, and his being a classical scholar, as well as a proficient in several modern languages, rendered it easy for him to obtain a tutorship to some young men of wealth and position, who were going into the cavalry.

A few years passed, during which Philip Holroyd had earned an ample income, when, at the termination of one of his engagements, he accompanied his mother to Venice, where her friend, the exiled Duchesse, was now residing. It was there that Sir Norman and Lady Davenport, during a short autumn tour, met him. He sat next them at the table d'hôte: an acquaintance was formed which ripened into intimacy: they learned his story and the high estimation in which he was held, as well as his great power over the youths who came under his influence. They proposed that he should "coach" their eldest son for diplomacy, and he accepted the offer; but that particular experiment, as I have shown, failed. Philip returned to Gratz, where his mother died shortly afterward, and he was then appointed tutor to one of the archdukes: a post which he filled with infinite credit. Nothing but his strong regard for Lady Davenport would have induced him to undertake the charge of Malcolm: but over this boy he felt pretty sure that he could obtain an ascendancy; and with his eyes open to the troubles and annoyances before him, he went back to Davenport.

The event, in a great measure, justified his reliance on his own strength; the boy had worked well under him, and was now a fair scholar. But his self-consciousness, and craving to draw attention to himself, by any means whatsoever, even at the risk of sarcasm, were weaknesses not easily combated; for they were fostered by one foolish person, as we shall presently see. He banged at the piano daily, "interpreting" some new master, in whose works right notes sounded quite as wrong as the mistakes; and he daubed over a great quantity of canvas. But, though he declared his intention of becoming a painter or a musician—he had not yet decided which—he seemed to believe he could arrive at eminence by some royal road, that obviated all the rugged paths of counterpoint, or anatomic study. Holroyd did not find that matters had improved at Davenport during the five years that had elapsed since he had left it. Lady Davenport never spoke of her anxieties; but that they were ever present to her mind, Philip Holroyd knew well. Sir Norman was rarely at home; and Roger came only for a few days occasionally, to try and extract money from his mother. Malcolm and his tutor led a solitary life; and as the boy was not fond of sport, the recreations afforded by a rabbit-warren and a trout-stream were lost to him. Holroyd occasionally took his gun and a blind old pointer out, and sometimes strode away alone far across the hills; feeling

that need of bodily fatigue which besets men who have been accustomed in early life to athletic exercise. But, as a rule, he made the boy his companion, whenever Malcolm was so minded; in doing which he acted rigidly according to his sense of duty; for neither inclination nor the terms of his agreement bound him to such a course. Holroyd was not a conspicuously unselfish, nor even what may be termed a generally-benevolent man. His was not one of those natures that easily attaches itself, and his heart was not drawn toward the youth, whose manners and utterances constantly irritated him; but he recognized some good underlying much that was affected in the lad; and he believed that this good could be better drawn out by constant companionship, than by merely reading *Æschylus* or *Schiller* with his charge.

In appearance Holroyd was not quite English; yet still less was he like a Frenchman, although his head was thought to resemble one which towers over all, in the history of that nation. His profile certainly recalled Napoleon's, with its thin aquiline nose, square beardless jaw, and firmly-cleft chin. But the tall, spare frame, erect in carriage and rapid in movement, was as unlike "*le petit-caporal's*," as were the clear gray eyes, and short closely curling hair, which grew as thick as it had done twenty years ago, though its auburn had darkened into brown.

He was not generally very popular, being too reticent to attract casual acquaintances; while there was a military decision in the enunciation of his opinions which displeased many. Sir Norman, who, in his love for foreign idiom, occasionally hit upon a word which is really untranslatable, said his manner was sometimes *cas-sant*. The fact is, that though, unlike the Psalmist, he could refrain from speaking with his tongue, even when the fire within kindled at folly and falsehood, if he did speak—if called upon for his opinion—he gave it relentlessly, unsoftened by any emollient circumlocution whatsoever. This was not the case in his intercourse with Lady Davenport. When he differed from her, he did so in a manner which showed that her opinion had weight with him, and that, if he rejected it, it was only after some deliberation; a concession especially gratifying from one who treated the world's judgments rather superciliously. But, indeed, toward women generally his manner was marked by a deference, often (it must be confessed) cold and distant; and never, under any circumstances, unduly familiar, contemptuous, or self-asserting.

There was, however, one exception to this rule; one woman, in conversation with whom he rarely succeeded in controlling his impatience, not because he entertained a cordial contempt for her; but because her unbridled curiosity and mischievous tongue constantly appealed to him for information, or tried to elicit his opinion as to some of the secret passages which undermined the family structure. This person was Sir Norman's only sister, Lady Retford, a widow without children, and with a good fortune: part of which was at her own disposal. Those last words reveal the secret of her being welcomed to Davenport, whenever she chose to propose a visit. She was not an ill-natured woman in deeds; she was known to have done many kind actions, and toward her brother and his family she often behaved with generosity. For this, Lady Davenport con-

strained herself to receive her sister-in-law with some show of cordiality. But her visits were severe trials. Not alone because of her want of delicacy in prying, and probing Lady Davenport's hidden wounds; not alone because of the stream of gossip—sometimes rapid, sometimes scandalous—which flowed unceasingly from her lips; but because of the pernicious effects which her partiality for Malcolm produced. She always spoke of him as “that poor dear boy;” his follies were excused, if not actually approved; his painting was extolled, his wretched singing applauded, his indolence encouraged; and his hard fate in having such a task-master as Holroyd deplored. Though her curiosity and love of talking impelled her to speak to her nephew's tutor, his manner, and the impossibility of getting any “change” out of him, made her very angry. She always called him, behind his back, “the military dictator,” a verbal pleasantry which afforded her infinite satisfaction. It was no wonder he dreaded her visits: the mischief done to Malcolm, it took some weeks after her departure to repair.

When Lady Retford heard of Miss Johnstone's coming to reside in her brother's house, the idea amused her. She instantly proposed to pay a visit to Davenport at the time of the young lady's arrival. Her curiosity was aroused, and her powers of imagination stimulated, at the prospect of this girl with her riches and her *sauvagerie* (“as Norman calls it”) becoming a member of her brother's household. Would he flirt with her, and kindle anew my lady's jealousy? Or would he try and persuade that scapegrace, Roger, to repair the family fortunes, by proposing to her? Lady Retford's mind, which she herself conceived to be of a sentimental cast, but which more nearly resembled one of the comedies of the Restoration in its uncastigated exuberance and love of intrigue, ran riot as to the complications which might arise from the Australian heiress' arrival.

It was one of those soft gray winter days which are colorless in cities, but are not unbecoming to the delicate half-tints and sober Ruysdael-like tones of an English landscape, when Catherine Johnstone drove from the station through the fine old park of Davenport. Much of it was let off for grazing; many of the old oaks were cut down. The farm buildings, cottages, and fences were out of repair; but the girl saw nothing of all this. What she saw was a great sweep of upland grass on which cattle and sheep were feeding; dark belts of wood against the low gray sky that they seemed to touch; patches of fern, some still green, but mostly brown and broken; a solitary Scotch-fir here and there; a piece of water, whose edges were fringed with tall reeds, and with the crimson log-wood which, with the last few drops of gold upon a birch-tree, formed the only spot of positive color in a panorama that seemed almost to be painted in monochrome. She had genuine love for the country; her strong animal nature rejoiced in the freedom, the fresh breeze, the birds of the air and the beasts of the field; just as her quick intelligence and eager curiosity touching that of which she had read, sought to satisfy themselves by contact with the world of cultivation and refinement. She took a long breath, and turned a smiling face to her little maid, Jane, as she looked out of the windows right and left. How preferable this was to Kensington Gardens in November.

At last there came in sight a large gray stone house, with a Grecian portico and two wings—such an imposing structure as she had beheld depicted in old pocket-books, but had never yet seen realized. It struck her as grand, it fulfilled all her expectations, her ignorance of the laws of architecture being, happily, complete, and her demand for windows and columns, regardless of insignificant details, being amply satisfied. Viewed by the lights of the present age, it was, indeed, an unlovely dwelling, though it had afforded infinite satisfaction to its builder ninety years ago. The gravel drive swept under the portico, and Catherine Johnstone was handed out of her fly by Sir Norman, in a velvet coat and leather gaiters—most becomingly got up for the part of a country squire.

Through the square hall, with its glass cases filled with stuffed birds, into a long library furnished with the hideous and indestructible massiveness of a departed Gillow, Sir Norman, voluble and cordial, conducted his young guest. At the fire-place, facing four windows which looked upon a level space of lawn, a ponderous sofa, with some easy-chairs, and a small table, on which were the newspapers of the day and a work-basket, were disposed comfortably enough. Outside this little bay of warmth lay islands of refuge, formed by sofas, and settees drawn near larger tables, covered with books and portfolios, and a blue china bowl or two, filled with yellow chrysanthemums. Somehow, in spite of the shabbiness of the old Turkey carpet, and red stuff curtains, in spite of the unwieldiness of the furniture, and the absence of all those pretty trifles that make glad a modern drawing-room, the apartment not only said to you that it was the residence of a gentleman, it looked cheerful, it invited you to make yourself at home here, around the old-fashioned chimney-piece, with the friendly, unalterable companionship of books, and the capacious arms of well-worn leather chairs open to receive you on every side.

Lady Davenport, who was on the sofa, rose and came forward with a serene smile to welcome the new-comer. The lady on the opposite side of the fire-place only raised her double-glass, and stopped knitting; as Catherine's quick eyes observed. But a moment later, Sir Norman said, "Miss Johnstone, let me introduce you to my sister, Lady Retford," and then the lady rose quickly, dropped her knitting, screwed up her eyes till they became invisible, and put out her hand.

She was a shambling, ungainly woman of fifty, expensively attired, but untidy withal, wearing innumerable chains, rings, and locketts, and a cap which always looked as if it were tumbling off her head. Under this cap, her own hair, still dark, hung in wild locks about a face which was not wanting in beauty, and had indeed been much vaunted in her youth. Her short-sighted eyes, when she allowed one to see them, were handsome; her nose, albeit "tip-tilted," was well formed, her teeth white and even. But the countenance wanted charm; it was restless, vacuous, uninformed. Many an ugly face has inspired a strong passion; one felt as one looked at this one, that never in the first flush of youth could it have done so, for it lacked equally the Madonna-like calm of which we ask nothing, and those bright gleams of intelligence and emotion, which flash with the electric spark of sympathy from one soul to another.

"I am glad it is not raining for your arrival here," said Lady Davenport. "We have had so much rain lately, I hope you have brought us fine weather, Miss Johnstone."

"I have been long enough in England never to expect to see the sun," returned the girl with a laugh, "and I am happily indifferent to it. What a beautiful place this is! You know it is the first park I have ever seen."

"Fancy!" exclaimed Lady Retford on a very high note.

"I am charmed that you like my poor old home," said Sir Norman, with a little bow and a smile. "You will find plenty of room in it, at all events," he added, breaking into a laugh. "This is the only sitting-room we use now, but later, we will open the big saloon for you, when we have a large party. Out there is the lawn-tennis ground. You play at lawn-tennis?"

"No, I have never even seen it. But I mean to learn. Do you play, Lady Davenport?"

"Oh, dear no! but my youngest boy and his tutor do. They will teach you."

"So much the fashion," cried Lady Retford. "No girl can get on without learning now. Ever been to Prince's?"

"What Princes? I know no Princes however, and have been nowhere since I came to England."

Sir Norman explained to what his sister's inquiry referred; when that lady broke in, with a rapid volley of questions.

"Did you bring down any news? There's absolutely nothing in the paper! What is everybody doing? Is every one gone to sleep? There's not even a murder, or a mysterious robbery to enliven one."

Miss Johnstone's eyes twinkled with fun.

"The price of wool is risen, and there is a considerable increase in the import of meat from Australia—"

Lady Retford concentrated her mystification into the single word "Gracious!" opening her eyes wide for a moment; a spasmodic movement altogether independent of sight, which, indeed, was impeded thereby.

"Ah! wool? indeed," said Sir Norman, a little dubiously, as one fearing to adventure on thin ice. "I am afraid I know very little about farming—*ce n'est pas mon affaire*. I passed all my youth abroad, you see, and to have bucolic tastes one must be bred in the country. But," he added, with a bland smile, "if the subject is one that interests you—"

"Why, of course it interests me, Sir Norman! The only living subject of interest I had for twenty years was our farm stock; except my dogs and horses."

"Ah! horses! That reminds me. Yours came yesterday, and there is a meet three miles from here, to-morrow. That is something, I fancy, will be new to you—though our farming will seem on a miserable scale after what you have been used to. I don't hunt myself, but I will ride with you to the meet, if you are so disposed."

She replied with animation that she should be delighted, and asked if she might see the stables.

"Would you like to see your room first?" said Lady Davenport.

"No, thank you, I'll go and look at my horses before it gets dark," and conducted by the bland Sir Norman, she left the room.

"What an extraordinary girl!" cried Lady Rettford. "What *aplomb* for a woman who has never been in society! And then to go and see her horses before she sees her own room—so very odd, you know!"

"She is not cast in the conventional mold of young ladies," returned her sister-in-law, "but her frankness is pleasant to me. I am sure there will be nothing underhand about her."

Lady Rettford laughed—a sort of upside-down laugh. "No—I don't think you need be afraid about Norman. She will keep him in order. She is not his style of young woman at all, my dear—though she is really not bad-looking for an heiress. But gracious! What *aplomb*!"

CHAPTER V.

CATHERINE JOHNSTONE had kept a journal since childhood. The lady to whose charge her education had been intrusted had urged her to write down daily her impressions on what she read, or what struck her in nature.

Her life had been an uneventful one for years; and it was not for the purpose of recording events, but to observe for herself and note her observations, to form definite opinions, and acquire the facility of expressing them; thus the habit had been formed. The entry was often limited to a single line, but few days passed without one; and, since her arrival in England, it had often extended to several pages. When she sat down at night now, her pen ran on, committing to paper, in a concrete form, the passing impressions of the day. These had a freshness, and sometimes—not always—an acuteness of perception, which appear to me to warrant my transcribing them from time to time, because they indicate more forcibly than I could do the writer's attitude of mind toward those with whom she came into frequent contact.

The account of her arrival at Davenport is given with great minutiae. Then follow these words:—

"Sir Norman took me to the stables: which are good. The bay knew me at once, though I have only had her a week, turned her head, and whinnied when I came up to her with a carrot. Sir N. declared it was only cupboard love—that is the way the best affections are misunderstood. He says I must call her 'Victory,' because bays were always devoted to that goddess. The baronet has such delightful manners! I never met with any one yet so polite as he is—very unlike any of the old men I have ever known. I feel the difference in the smallest things—in the very way he pulls out his pocket-handkerchief and blows his nose! Who does he resemble that I have read of? Would 'Pelham' have grown to be like him at sixty?"

"One of the carriage horses hurt his near hind-leg in getting out of the train yesterday, which is a bore, as it will lay him up for a week. When we entered his loose-box, there was a man with his back to us, stooping to examine the fetlock. As he rose and turned, Sir Norman said, 'Ah! Mr. Holroyd,' and introduced him to me—a hard, finely built, masterful-looking man, who bowed with a sort

of foreign stiffness, clicking his heels together, and then drew himself up, as though he had swallowed a ramrod. That simile, however, only occurs to me now that I am told he has been a soldier. I didn't like him: I don't feel as if I should ever be friends with him. There is no what Sir Norman calls *bonhomie* about him (which I suppose is something between good-humor and jollity). He seems to understand horses, however, which is a point in his favor; said it was useless sending for a 'vet,' and told the groom exactly what to do—and I could see that the stable-yard accepted his opinions as final. I had always imagined a tutor in spectacles, with possibly a brown wig, and certainly dressed in black; a man who would not know a horse's head from his tail, and who would hold forth by the hour together, if one gave him the smallest encouragement. This stalwart military figure, in his brown tweed suit, giving his decision upon my horse's leg in almost a peremptory manner, and then walking straightway into the house without ever attempting to say a word to me, destroyed all my preconceived ideas.

"Lady Davenport took me to my bedroom, which is a very large one, opening into a sitting-room, which is to be my own. They are shabbily but not uncomfortably furnished, with a southern aspect, and wide expanse of view over the park. Lady D. then showed me her own boudoir, which looks much more like a business-man's office—a huge bureau in the middle of the room, strewn with bundles of papers, files of bills, letters, and legal-looking documents; no pictures, no flowers, no tapestry; all hard, practical work. The graces of life, I suspect, are all congregated in Sir Norman's den. She was very kind, and begged me whenever I wanted anything to come straight to her.

" 'You will always find me here,' she said, 'the whole morning. If you should ever be in any perplexity, if you should ever need advice, or help in any way, make a confidante of me—and of no one else.

" 'We were six at dinner, at a round table. It was pleasant and easy, and quite different from those awful stiff dinner-parties of Aunt Emma's, with the grove of artificial flowers down a long table, and aunt and uncle both so preoccupied with the waiting and the dishes, that every attempt at conversation was crushed by one or other calling out, 'You have got the wrong sauce;'—or, 'You must not let that dish pass—it is excellent;' or, 'Haven't they brought you the peas?' Everything here is done without any fuss: and no one pays any attention to how much or how little you eat (I was awfully hungry); and the servants don't rush round the room, and bang against each other, as they did at Aberdeen Terrace. There was an uninterrupted flow of conversation, chiefly supplied by Lady Retford and Sir Norman; not of a very high order, certainly, but full of gossip about royal and other eminent persons, which amused me. I suppose it was beneath Mr. Holroyd's dignity; he joined very little in the conversation; but his pupil, Malcolm, who sat next to me, made up for the deficiency. He is a pretty lad of eighteen, with fair hair, pale, watery-blue eyes, and a flower in his button-hole. He is not an absolute fool, though he looks and (to my thinking) talks like one. At least, I did not understand half that he said—but perhaps the fault was mine. He

said he adored lilies—they were so Venetian. I thought I had read that there were no gardens in Venice—but I suppose I am wrong. The tutor cut him short—very short—once or twice; but as Lady Retford laughed admiringly at whatever the boy said, and gazed at him through her double-glass, and cried fondly, ‘Gracious! Malcolm!’ I doubt if Mr. Holroyd’s stern face and manner produced much effect. Once, when Lady Davenport was describing how one of the neighbors had recently furnished his drawing-room, and what a pretty sofa she had seen there,

“‘Sofas,’ exclaimed Mr. Malcolm, ‘ah! how I wish we were all living on sofas, like the Romans, crowned with roses—instead of sitting upright at table! Don’t you, Miss Johnstone? it is so ungraceful!’

“I laughed, and said that if I had to be a Roman, I would belong to that race before its decline, which was marked by effeminacy; upon which Lady Retford screwed up her eyes at me and said:

“‘Malcolm has such a picturesque mind! He sees everything in life like a tableau. It is not every one who can understand him—but I do. There is a sympathy between us.’

“Lady D. diverted the conversation into another channel; but after dinner, when we three ladies had retired, she could not stem the torrent of her sister-in-law’s nonsense. She asked me whether her nephew did not strike me as being ‘all soul.’ I really was at a loss how to reply; remembering what an excellent dinner he had eaten. My answer, whatever it was, did not satisfy her, for she rejoined sharply, ‘Oh! it requires a refinement—something that few possess—to understand him.’ This lady strikes me as an odd compound of sentimentality and impudence. She said more things than this, which I, in my ignorance of society, should call rude. She asked me where my gown was made: and then, almost immediately added, ‘I suppose people in the bush don’t wear any clothes, do they?’ I looked at her bare shoulders, and replied, ‘Yes, and old women wear a great many.’

“Now, Lady Davenport’s way of letting me know that my dress needs reform was very different. The refined youth had been playing on the piano (I am no judge of music, but it struck me as a sort of wandering performance) when he came and sprawled on the ottoman beside me, and said he was sorry to see I was fond of crude harmonies.

“I thought he was talking about his music. ‘Why do you say that?’ I replied. ‘I know nothing of harmonies, crude or otherwise.’

“‘I was alluding to color,’ the youth said, fixing his eyes on my yellow dress. ‘It requires education. You strike the dominant in two major keys at once, as it were. I am fond of discords, but they must be passing ones. Blue may have an accent of green, or purple an accent of blue, or yellow an accent of orange; but they must not be insisted on: and minor keys are generally so much more delightful. They suggest all the mysterious poetry of life—the majors only the hard prose.’

“I laughed, and said he would find, when he knew me better, I was intensely prosaic: and then his mother, who happened to have heard him, said quickly:

“ ‘Don’t be silly, Malcolm. Miss Johnstone is not used to fine art jargon, and will think you very ill-bred, as well as silly. You must kindly forgive him. We are all of us rather demented, I believe, on the subject of violent contrasts.’ ”

“ ‘You don’t like the scarlet poppies on my yellow gown—is that it?’ ”

“ ‘I think, perhaps, they would look better on white. Shall we have a consultation to-morrow on the important subject of dress? May I tender a little advice, without your thinking me intrusive?’ ”

“ ‘Of course I thanked her heartily, for I don’t mind what any one says, if they do it in that nice way. It was mortifying to find that a frock I had never worn before, and which I flattered myself was lovely, was universally condemned; but I am resolved to do whatever Lady D. tells me.’ ”

“ ‘As to that most repulsive tutor, he read ‘The Nineteenth Century’ the whole evening, without once looking up. He certainly did not know if I was dressed in yellow, or in sackcloth. But when we rose to leave the room, he jumped up and held open the door, with a bow like Sir Charles Grandison. He was delighted to get rid of us, I know.’ ”

A month passed: one or two unimportant visitors came and went. Catherine hunted generally twice a week, when the meets were near, and when Sir Norman could find some steady elderly man to whose care he could confide his charge. Lady Davenport’s injunctions had been very particular on this head, and Miss Johnstone showed her readiness to sacrifice her pleasure, in conformity with the elder lady’s advice, by turning back more than once, when such escort was not forthcoming. She made several acquaintances in the hunting-field, chiefly of course men; by whom she was considered to be “a very jolly girl—no humbug about her.” Of ladies in the neighborhood she had as yet seen nothing. One very pretty little woman, driving a pair of spirited ponies, she had observed twice at the meet, and on inquiry had been told her name was Courtland; but no introduction took place till one morning in December, when the pony-carriage drove up close to where Catherine was standing, and Mrs. Courtland begged Sir Norman to introduce her to his charge.

“ ‘Certainly—enchanted—she is, you know, a distant cousin of mine. Johnstones—old family—a delightful girl’—all this in a low voice, bending from his saddle over the fair occupant of the pony-carriage; then turning round—“My dear Miss Johnstone let me introduce you to Mrs. Courtland—one of our most charming neighbors.”’ ”

Catherine felt herself much attracted by the little lady, whose eyes were so lovely when she looked up, and whose manner was so very cordial.

“ ‘I hope you will come and see me? Come some day to luncheon—do. Of course I shall call on you directly, but Lady Davenport is never at home when I call—and I suppose you too are out all the afternoon?’ ”

Catherine admitted that she generally was.

On her return, when the introduction was mentioned to Lady Dav-

enport, she said nothing; but Lady Retford, whose utterances were never governed by much reticence, exclaimed—

“Who has she dancing attendance upon her now, I wonder, since Roger is absent?”

This appeal for information remained unanswered. Two days later the pony-carriage drove under the portico of Davenport House, and, with the anticipated result, drove off again; though Lady Davenport was at her bureau upstairs, as the servants knew full well.

One morning, shortly after this, Catherine said at breakfast, “Will you take me to call on Mrs. Courtland to-day? I want to return her visit.”

There was a little hesitation in Lady Davenport’s manner; but she assented without comment.

On the way to Brookwood, however, as they were alone she thought well to say a word or two touching the lady they were about to visit.

“She is a foolish little person—not a desirable one for you to become intimate with. I know very little of her myself; but one can not help hearing what is said of her. I have lived so much out of the world since she came into this neighborhood, that she has never been inside my doors; but Sir Norman and my son go to Brookwood constantly, and I suppose, therefore, as we are beginning to entertain, that we must ask her and her husband to dinner.”

“Oh, she *has* a husband? I have never heard him mentioned.”

“He is very seldom at home. He is in business which takes him constantly to Germany, and he has his offices in London, so that he is scarcely ever down here for more than a few days at a time.”

“Is he a nice man?”

“I really don’t know; I fancy he is a little common in appearance and manner; but he may have very sterling qualities, and is certainly very indulgent to his wife.”

“Indulgent? But if he leaves her almost always alone?”

“I am afraid she does not regard that as altogether a misfortune. She does not care about her husband, I am told, and—”

“How can she care for him, if he cares for *her* so little as to be always away from her? Why doesn’t he make her live with him in London?”

“I can’t tell you; perhaps she wouldn’t like it. She has always been accustomed to have her own way. She had a good fortune of her own, which is settled upon herself, and Mr. Courtland lets her do just what she likes. She married to escape from the school-room, before she had seen anything of the world. She was not the least in love; and she now sees too late what a mistake she made. But Mr. Courtland is very good to her; and she has three little children. I am afraid, however, that she is not properly grateful for either blessing.”

They found Mrs. Courtland at home, in a modern and sumptuous suite of rooms, which contrasted strangely in Catherine’s eyes with the Georgian shabbiness of Davenport House. The chairs were miracles of French upholstery, padded, and draped, and fringed, after the most costly fashion; the tables were covered with china, and quaint little ornaments in silver; the walls were hung with pale blue satin, and mirrors in each possible corner threw back the beholder

restlessly upon himself wherever he turned his eyes. Catherine wondered why it was that, in spite of all this splendor, the house looked to her far less comfortable than Davenport, and as belonging to people of altogether another and inferior stamp.

Mrs. Courtland received them in a gorgeous tea-gown, of pale rose color, and did all she could to ingratiate herself with her visitors. The effort was, perhaps, a little too apparent; but the intention it would have been captious to criticise. She took them into the conservatory, and cut all her best roses for Lady Davenport; she pressed Catherine to name a day when she would ride over to luncheon; she was gay, and sparkling, and unquestionably most attractive, with her pretty kitten-like movements, and soft dove-like eyes. She told them she was going to give a ball shortly after the New Year, and expressed a hope that Lady Davenport would fill her house for it.

"We shall probably have some young people with us about that time," said Lady Davenport.

"And your son? Will Mr. Davenport be with you?"

"Probably: I don't know his movements," replied the other dryly. "He likes to take us by surprise."

"I suppose you will keep your party for the C—— ball in the middle of January, as I see you are one of the patronesses, this year?"

"Yes, I am one of the patronesses, having a young lady now to take out; and I suppose we shall be expected to bring a party with us. Are your children at home?"

"Oh! I suppose so. They're in the nursery. I never have them down here—it's such a bore for one's friends."

Lady Davenport said no more, but rose to depart.

"How pretty she is!" said Catherine, when they were in the carriage.

"Yes, she is pretty, and that is all," was the reply.

* * * * *

In Catherine's diary that night, after describing her visit to Brookwood and the impression produced by its mistress, she wrote—

"On the way home I asked to be let out of the carriage, as we were less than four miles from Davenport and I wanted a walk. Lady D. tried to dissuade me. 'Had you not better wait till we reach the Lodge? You can walk in the park as long as you like.' She also said something about tramps; but I laughed, and assured her I was able to find my own way, and was afraid of nothing. So the carriage was stopped, and I jumped out. Lady D's last words were, 'About a mile further on you will find a path across some fields to the right, which will bring you to the home-farm, and from there you can get into the park.'

"I obeyed her injunctions, as I thought, to the letter: but in the field I missed my way, for there were two paths, and I took one which brought me to a broad ditch, which the cattle were accustomed to cross, but which it required some agility to jump. It was not this, however, which made me hesitate, but the conviction that I must have taken a wrong turning. Lady D. would never have expected me to leap a ditch! While I was demurring what I should do, I caught sight of two figures, separated from me by a hedge,

walking in an opposite direction, and at too great a distance for me to distinguish, in the dusk, what manner of men they were. I shouted at the top of my voice; the men stopped, and turned. I bellowed my inquiry, 'Will this lead me to Davenport House?' but they evidently did not hear. They retraced their steps; now they were in the next field and approaching the ditch which separated us: and then I recognized them—Malcolm and his tutor! I don't know why, but I was a little annoyed.

" 'I beg your pardon for calling you back;' I said (in far from a contrite tone, I fear), 'but will this path lead me to the House?'

" 'If you were this side of the ditch it would,' returned the tutor dryly.

" 'You should have kept to the right. There is a plank across, half a mile lower down. You can't cross here,' sighed Malcolm, leaning in an attitude on his stick.

" 'Why shouldn't I jump?'

" 'Because you would probably fall in,' returned Mr. Holroyd.

" 'I've jumped wider ditches than that.'

" 'But it is all soft mud!' remonstrated the youth. 'You'd better not try.'

" 'Stand out of the way, Malcolm,' said his tutor: and going back a yard or two, he came at the ditch with a run, and alighted close to me. 'If you are bent on jumping, you had better have a hand—it will at least prevent your falling back into the mud.'

" 'Thank you—but I am not so awkward as you seem to imagine,' I returned, as I ran back a few yards, resolved to show this supercilious gentleman that I was independent of his help. I cleared the ditch—but I had not calculated on the softness of the steep slope on which my feet alighted. With a strong hand to support me, I should have been safe: as it was, my feet slipped; I lost my balance, and fell backward into the ditch! I never felt more angry—more humiliated. I had to take his hand after all, to pull me up the bank. I looked to see if he was laughing, but no; he kept his gravity: while Malcolm was too much concerned with the condition of my velvet jacket to smile. It was I who laughed, at last—

" 'Well! pride must have a fall. Don't look so distressed, Mr. Malcolm. I am not the least hurt. And, you know, if the bank hadn't been so slippery—'

" 'Ah! *Facilis descensus*. But you fell most gracefully among the bulrushes, and you rose like a water-nymph—didn't she, Mr. Holroyd?'

" 'Your feet must be wet through,' he said, without heeding the interrogation. 'You had better walk home quickly.'

" 'Let me first bend my hat into shape again. What an object I am! Luckily, it will be quite dark before we reach the house, I should be ashamed to be seen.'

" 'We set out, and I made Mr. Holroyd talk—very much against his inclination, I believe. Malcolm was disposed to monopolize the conversation, and instruct me as to 'the majesty of tone' in a turnip-field, but I snubbed him. I told him I knew nothing about symphonies in green, and that art talk was thrown away on me. Then I turned to the tutor, and threaded one or two questions so ingeniously that there was no escape for him. During the month I have

been here, I have never had so much conversation with him before. He distinctly avoids me; there can be no doubt of this; and yet I constantly catch him watching me when I am talking—which is anything but pleasant. My curiosity to-day was piqued to learn if this reticent individual had much in him; remembering the Latin proverb I have heard translated to the effect that we are apt to take the ‘unknown for the magnificent.’ Not that I felt myself in danger of falling into such a delusion as regarded Mr. Holroyd: still, that little incident of the ditch—the calm way in which he took my discomfort without a smile, or even a hint at the ‘I told you so’ reproach—impressed me to a certain degree with a sense of power. It might be that he was deficient in humor; though a twinkle in his gray eye at moments seemed to forbid that hypothesis. But he was, at all events, a man: possibly a dull one, and almost certainly contemptuous and indifferent to women: but with nothing petty or weak about him. During our walk home I came to this conclusion: he has ability which, for some reason or other, he does not choose to display in conversation with *me*, at least; he has an inordinate opinion of himself, and is probably as cold as he is proud. He is a puzzle, and not a pleasant one. People possessed of so much self-control never are so—they irritate me. Perhaps it is due to his military education; but he always seems to be afraid of letting himself go. He clearly was so to-day: all his speeches were so dreadfully guarded! I, on the contrary, as I always do, ‘let myself go’ completely: he got much more out of me than I did out of him; and yet he answered all my questions. I wish I were not so frank: I am sure it is a mistake. Here, for example, is an instance of the way in which I was led on to speak about myself. I asked him if he preferred London, or the country? He replied:

“‘I know nothing of London. Under certain circumstances, perhaps I should like it.’

“‘I suppose you would like to be a Life Guardsman? You like horses, and a military life, don’t you?’

“‘A military life of routine between London and Windsor would not be to my taste.’

“‘What sort of life would be, then?’

“‘An active one in politics, or literature, or business—if I lived in London.’

“‘You are more content with a life of routine in the country?’

“‘There is progression in our routine—at least I hope so,’ he added, with a passing smile. ‘The grooming of a charger, the polish of a cuirass, even cavalry drill, can no be carried beyond a certain point. Here our mental grooming and drill,’ he glanced at Malcolm, ‘have not yet reached perfection.’

“‘You led this life of military mechanism once, did you not?’

“‘Yes, and I was happy in it. I learned discipline, and some other things which I needed. But then I had a soldier’s ambition when I was young.’

“‘You seem to infer that ambition makes one happy. I thought it was just the contrary.’

“‘It is trying to accomplish something, however little worthy the end may be of the pains, that gives an interest to life; as you have learned, no doubt.’

"I fancied there was a slight inflection of sarcasm in the last words, so I answered quickly,

"I do not know that I wish to accomplish anything. I am very ignorant of society, and my chief interest at present is the gratification of my curiosity in a sphere of life that is new to me."

"Exactly so."

"I want to see something of a better class of people than that with which I have associated hitherto. I care very little for money, or the things it gives—except a horse. But this particular thing I thought it might procure me—an entrance into good society, and, you see in my case, the "something" is already "accomplished." If I don't like it, I can go back to my native bush, you know."

"You will not return the same that you left it."

"Indeed, I hope not. If I return it will be because I have grown too wise to care for any of the pleasures of the world. At present I fancy I shall care for them very much. I mean to enjoy myself immensely."

"No doubt you will." He turned to Malcolm abruptly, with an almost ostentatious desire to cut short our conversation; and I remained with the mortifying conviction that I had said more about myself than was called for, or than my interlocutor cared to hear.

"It was dusk when we reached the hall, and the two men entered the house by a small door, which led directly to the wing they occupied. I hoped to slip into the vestibule unobserved, but as I opened the door, I saw through the growing darkness that it was not empty. A man with his back toward me, and a candlestick in his hand, was stooping over the fire lighting a taper. I had to pass close to him, in order to reach the staircase. He turned, and the light fell full upon me. I looked at his face—it was the handsomest I have ever seen in man or woman—and utterly unknown to me. He was tall and broad-shouldered, but otherwise slight. Very fair, with a soft mustache but no beard or whiskers, features of wonderful delicacy, and eyes, I don't know their color even now, only that they lit up the dim hall as he bent them upon me. For a second, only a second, I paused, then walked swiftly on, vexed to think what a plight I was in to appear before the eyes of a stranger. I had caught the look of amused astonishment on his face; mine I am sure was scarlet. The next moment, I heard a musical voice say behind me:

"May I not offer you this candle? The stairs are dark."

"No, thank you," I replied brusquely, without turning round.

"That was all I saw of him till I came down to dinner, and was introduced to the eldest son of the house, Roger Davenport, who had arrived quite unexpectedly. He is my ideal of a hero of romance—not only so wonderfully handsome and so aristocratic-looking, but with manners unlike those of any other man I have ever seen. It is impossible he could ever do anything awkward, or that his voice could be otherwise than musical. He has something of his mother's coldness, and something of his father's gallantry toward women; but it is restrained, and never reaches the point of assiduity. There is a subtle flattery, however, in the way he listens to one, which is worth all the compliments and protestations in the world. I dare say it is the same to every woman, and means nothing; but it is not the less attractive. So different from that stern, cautious, un-

bending tutor, whom one has to hammer at before one can strike a spark from him.

"As to his conversation, I can not recall a single word that he uttered this evening; and yet the general effect he has left on me is that he is most agreeable. Am I weak enough to be swayed by his looks, or by the music of his voice, or by the nameless charm of a manner which recalls what I conceive to have been the courtly grace of Philip Sydney?"

CHAPTER VI.

SIR NORMAN and his eldest son were alone together in the smoking-room that night: the father in a suit of black velvet, the son in a gorgeous embroidered Turkish jacket and trousers. His handsome face was difficult to read. It was habitually calm and inscrutable as a granite Sphinx's. He held out a silver cigar-case to Sir Norman.

"Try one of these regalias. They are better than those beastly cheroots."

The young man's voice was singularly soft, and he spoke rather slowly; which gave a peculiar effect to some of the things he said.

Sir Norman laughed as he threw away his half finished cigar and took the one his son offered.

"You extravagant dog! Where did you get these?"

"Given me—Look here. I want to talk business—that's what brought me down here to-day. You hate it as much as I do, but—"

"Stop! I know what 'business' means in your mouth, Roger. It's the old story, of course. But I tell you once for all, it is of no use applying to me to pay your debts again, for I can't. The estate is mortgaged every shilling it can stand. If you married and had a son we could cut off the entail, but you can't, as you know; and there is no other means of raising money."

"Except by marrying it," said the young man, quietly.

"Ah! If you could find a Manchester heiress, well and good."

"Wouldn't an Australian heiress do?"

The father and son looked at each other. Roger remained unmoved; Sir Norman laughed, fidgeted on his chair, and ejaculated, "Pshaw! Your mother would never hear of it."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because—because she knows what you are about women—and so on—and she only consented to take the girl on condition that there should be nothing of the kind."

"She is not bad-looking—if she were not so fearfully and wonderfully dressed." Roger half closed his eyes in a dreamy manner as he dropped the ashes from his cigar into the grate. "The only question is, what has she got?"

"Twelve thousand a year."

"Tied up?"

"That I don't know."

"Can't you find out through Quicksen? It will be no use wasting my time here if she can't pay my debts. I don't care about the tradesmen, of course; I don't much care about the Jews; but my debts of honor—I can't show at Tattersalls' till they're settled."

"*Dieu de Dieu!* Why, it is only nine months since your mother scraped together with great difficulty the amount you owed then! I am sure it is impossible she can pull you through again. As to this idea of yours, you surely don't imagine, if you did succeed with Miss Johnstone, that she would hand you over her fortune for you to make ducks and drakes of?"

"If she liked me enough to marry me I suppose she would pay my debts. Such things have been known."

"I can tell you this: she is no fool. What do your debts amount to?"

He drew his betting-book from his pocket and examined it leisurely.

"I must have two thousand three hundred on settling day—I owe Isaacs thirteen hundred. I suppose my floating debts are another thousand—but they are of no immediate consequence."

"*Sapristi, mon chère!* You'd better throw up the sponge. I see no other course for you but to write to the men you owe this money to, and ask them to give you time."

"I shall not do that," returned his son, after he had blown a cloud of smoke very gently and gradually from his mouth.

"What the deuce *will* you do then?"

"Write to Quicksen, if you won't—and remain here—at all events till I have his answer."

The baronet shook his head.

"I warn you that you'll have great difficulty with your mother. She will think it dishonorable to lend herself to any scheme which has this girl's money for its object."

The young man turned his beautiful blue eyes upon his father, and smiled ever so faintly.

"That is why I spoke to *you*. My mother must know nothing. I am not afraid of her, if you will keep my counsel. I sha'n't make a desperate onslaught on the girl—that isn't my cue. Only, if the money is all right, I may gradually become *attached*—do you see?"

"I'll be hanged if I can make you out, Roger. You have no more heart than a stone, I believe. Why! at your age I tumbled in love with every woman I met—"

"A weakness you have hardly yet conquered—" murmured his son, with the same soft smile.

"And—and I should never have dreamed of marrying if I hadn't been madly in love. Yes! ours was a real love match on both sides. Nothing could have induced me to make a cold calculating *marriage de raison* at your age—"

"Would it have made much difference *now*, if you had?" said Roger, still smiling. "But you must remember, you were rich then, and your choice, moreover, happily fell upon a girl who was not penniless. The sacrifice at Love's Altar was only that of your independence, and—forgive me for reminding you even that was only nominal. I am less susceptible than you, and the sacrifice with me is a necessity."

"Oh! of course, *c'est votre affaire!* If you at your age, resolve to marry for money, I have no objection. You have never chosen to work; you have hampered me with your debts, and irretrievably damaged your own prospects. Why, with your looks, and your

success with women, you might have married anybody—*anybody*! But you have now the reputation of a gambler, a *vaurien*, *qui a mangé sa fortune*—and mothers keep their girls out of your way. It is all very good fun flirting with married women, but it won't help you. By the bye, that reminds me: if you go on with Mrs. Courtland as you did the last time you were down here, you won't have a chance with Miss Johnstone."

"Not if her superior attractions, in the end, carry the day?" said his son, with a mild incredulity. "She must be different to most women, if it does not add a zest to the capture—and then, moreover, there is the triumph of virtue over vice!" He laughed his soft musical laugh, and hardly listened to his father's reply.

"I believe she is different. She is not at all easy to make out. I like her—she is so fresh and full of spirit, but I suspect she is tough—has what you call lots of 'character,'—nor to be captured quite so soon as you seem to imagine—*pas si bête*."

Roger sauntered up and down the room, puffing dreamily into the air, and watching the smoke as it curled upward, while he answered,

"Oh! I have no imagination, but I have tact, and temper, and—perseverance. I don't mind playing a fish. I have landed one before now, that nearly pulled my arms off. How long before you take her to town?"

"We shall move up in February, after the opening of Parliament."

"Why go so soon?"

"It was your mother's decision—not but what I am always glad to get back to town—but I left it to your mother. She said it was better the girl should be presented at the first Drawing Room, and drift into society gradually, before the season begins. When your mother undertakes a thing, you know, she does it thoroughly. I was afraid she would never have consented to the arrangement; nor would she, if she hadn't fancied the girl."

Roger's eyes twinkled; he half closed them, as he murmured,

"Oh! The money, then, had nothing to say to it?"

"Well, the extremely liberal terms proposed were what tempted us originally, of course. But the idea was so—so—new, that if the girl had not been very nice, and alone, and unfriended—"

"Oh, she is unfriended?"

"She has only some dreadful relations she can not live with, so that one felt it might be almost looked upon in the light of a duty to give her a home—especially, as I call her a connection—did I tell you that? You know we have Johnstone connections."

"I did not know it. Fortunate coincidence. Will you have another cigar? If not, I shall say 'good-night.'"

Sir Norman declined the offer: his son nodded, and sauntered out of the room, leaving his father to meditate—as far as he could ever be said to meditate—on Roger's projected schemes. In the light—very light—soil of his mind, nothing was capable of striking deep roots, neither principles nor affections, but he had spoken the truth when he had expressed amazement at his son's adamant nature. There had been a sentimental susceptibility, graceful romanticism about Sir Norman in his youth, which had imposed even upon himself. No wonder it did so upon women. Perhaps none of them be-

lieved in him very long; but many believed in succession. There was a conviction about his love-making, to which it was doubtful whether his far cleverer and handsomer son could ever attain.

A week passed, and Roger was still at Davenport. He had been up twice to London, and had seen Quicksen, instead of writing to him. The result of the second visit had been eminently satisfactory:—Catherine Johnstone had the entire disposal of her own fortune. Mr. Quicksen, while obtaining this information, which, in his client's interest, he felt bound to transmit to his heir, had said to the young lady's solicitor,

“Is Miss Johnstone a woman of business?”

“Well, no—I can't exactly say that. Her Australian affairs seem to be very strangely managed by her father's successor, Mr. Grogan, in whom she has blind confidence. I am looking into them now, and I am amazed at what appears to be very gross mismanagement. Happily, half her fortune is in the three-per-cents. She is careless about her money, and absurdly generous.”

“Ah! That is dangerous. She should have trustees—especially if she marries.”

The two men looked into each other's eyes: no more was said: but Mr. Quicksen walked away, having acquitted himself toward his own conscience. Let the girl marry the future Sir Roger, and pay his debts, if she chose: but she should not be beggared, if he, Quicksen, could help it.

Roger's behavior, as regarded Catherine, baffled Lady Retford, whose every sense was sharpened to apprehend his motives for remaining at Davenport, if he did not mean to “make up” to the heiress. She could perceive no sign of any such intention. He paid her no court; he laid none of those little plots for being alone with her, which are so easy of accomplishment in country houses; his attitude was generally one of silent and attentive consideration, in her presence. He listened when she talked—and she talked a great deal—as though she were a new experience in his life. He leaned in a graceful attitude against the chimney-piece, and bent those eyes which looked so full of meaning upon her. He spoke from time to time: he laughed softly; and dropped a satirical word or two, so gently, that they fell on the ear like a benediction; and then he sat down by his aunt on the sofa, and told her in an undertone some naughty story which delighted her. Clearly he could have no designs upon the Australian ingots: except when he was teaching her lawn-tennis, he and Catherine were rarely alone together. This instruction was generally delivered before luncheon, when Malcolm was with his tutor, and the elder ladies were busy with household matters and correspondence. In the afternoon, Miss Johnstone rode; and Roger had no horse. She had said to Lady Davenport, in her frank way,

“Would Mr. Davenport ride my second horse, if I offered it to him, instead of the groom?” Then, swift to detect a shade upon the mother's face, she added, quickly, “But perhaps he might not like to refuse, and yet think it a bore? only you could tell him that the horse is there, if he likes to use it.”

Lady Davenport thanked her: she did not promise to deliver the

message; she did not express an opinion as to what her son might or might not do—if he had the option given him.

Catherine thought the answer a little dry. "I did quite right not to name it to Mr. Davenport, or even Sir Norman," she said to herself. "They would have thought it forward—and yet it seemed so natural to me. But they sha'n't think I court his society—no! If he doesn't express a wish to ride with me, I will bite my tongue out sooner than ask him."

That night she wrote—

"There is no love lost between Mr. Davenport and his former tutor—I have discovered that. When I spoke of the latter to Mr. Davenport, he said in his soft, slow way, 'He is a great prig, don't you think so?' I replied that I really had had very little opportunity of judging—he so rarely deigned to speak to me. This evening, at dinner, I happened to look at Mr. Holroyd's powerful face, just as Mr. Davenport was telling some story to his aunt, too far off for me to hear. The expression of contempt and almost disgust that was written there quite startled me.

"R. D. was very pleasant to-day; he talked to me a long time. Certainly his manner is delightful. He seems unhappy, dissatisfied with his life (as he well may be), and really desirous to lead a new one. I must confess that he interests me very much—in spite of all I have heard about him. Mr. Holroyd let fall something one day, and Lady Retford is constantly dropping hints as to her nephew being a terrible reprobate."

The next day—it was the fourth since Roger's arrival, and two of them had been employed by his visits to London, an hour and a half distant by rail—when Catherine was riding out with her groom, Roger passed her in the old dog-cart, driving the only horse that Sir Norman had kept, until lately. The contrast between the carefully-appointed young man, the perfection of whose attire was possibly open to the charge of dandyism, and the "trap" he was driving, struck Catherine forcibly.

"No wonder he should be so little at home, without a horse to ride, or anything but that machine to drive. Where can he be going?"

And at dinner she asked him, without any hesitation, where he had been.

"To call on Mrs. Courtland." Every one at table heard the slow, suave tones. To Catherine alone, perhaps, they had no special significance. Lady Davenport's countenance betrayed nothing, but she sighed inwardly. Was that folly of last year to be renewed? Was this the attraction that brought and held her poor boy here now? Lady Retford was mightily amused, and completely blinded; as her nephew intended that she and his mother should be.

"So Roger is still carrying on his little games," she observed to her sister-in-law with a chuckle, in the course of the evening. "I was in hopes he had turned over a new leaf, and was going in for the heiress."

"There is no fear of that, I am glad to say. I should not call that turning over a new leaf. It is better that he should continue to

be foolish, than become heartless. If I thought he was 'going in for the heiress,' as you call it, I should warn her at once: indeed I should not let Roger remain here, if I saw a chance of it. I should consider it cruel and dishonorable to the girl in the last degree."

"My dear, you have such extreme views! Of course, there is nothing like sentiment, if you can get it. I always say, give me some one who is *simpatico*, and that is all I ask. But Roger isn't like Malcolm—he is not sentimental. He is a sensualist, my dear—*à la chasse de race*—an epicurean, like Norman. The only chance of pulling him out of his difficulties is to get him to marry money."

"I have my own views on that subject," returned Lady Davenport coldly. "He had better be in difficulties all his life and unmarried, than perjure himself, and imbitter a woman's whole existence."

After this, Roger contrived that the fact of his calling at Brookwood constantly should be known to Catherine. She was not surprised. Mrs. Courtland was very attractive; and Catherine had too low an opinion of her own powers of fascination to conceive the possibility of rivalry with so lovely a woman. This estimate of her own attraction was not incompatible with considerable pride, and—as has been seen—an unusual reliance on her own judgment.

She thought, in those days, that she understood his feeling. He seemed to like to talk to her, when they were alone, as he would have done to a trusted sister, or a friend, for whom he felt a growing respect and regard. His manner was the furthest removed from a lover's: it was depressed, and charged with secret trouble or reckless bitterness, which needed but little encouragement to be poured into sympathetic ears. And though Catherine withheld such encouragement, he contrived, in this way, to interest her far more than by the assumption of a passion which she would have mistrusted. She pitied him, and she pitied Mrs. Courtland also—foolish little woman though she was. But she did not return to Brookwood.

She wrote in her diary:—"I cannot help feeling that if Mr. D. was attached to a good and wise woman, who obtained an influence over him, he might become a very different man. Are the sins of youth never to be forgotten? Is he to be denied a helping hand, because he has been extravagant, and is in debt? It seems to me as if every one was so hard on him; and he is thrown, therefore, on the sympathy of an unwise woman, who probably thinks she is doing no harm. But she is. It is very odd, but I do not think Lady D. likes her son being much with me—nor does Mr. Holroyd. He was crossing the hill to-day as I was going out to the tennis ground. I asked him if he had seen Mr. Davenport, who had promised to play with me.

"Of course he is waiting for you on the ground," he replied. The manner more than the actual words irritated me.

"Ah! probably—he is always so polite," I said.

He flushed. 'I am not a lady's man, if that was meant for me, Miss Johnstone,' he returned quietly, 'but, though I am wise enough to know my position, and keep it, I trust I have never forgotten what is due from a gentleman to a lady.'

"No, Mr. Holroyd," I said, laughing. 'You are scrupulous as to what is due—but you are careful not to pay a farthing more.'

A few days after this, several guests were expected at Davenport. Some of them were to remain over Christmas, and for the two balls early in January; some were to make way for other guests. Mr. and Mrs. Courtland had been invited to dinner that day, and Catherine felt more excited than she liked to confess.

"Tell me who are coming here to-day, Mr. Davenport?" she said that morning. The luncheon bell had rung, and they were strolling toward the house from the tennis-court; she in her blue serge dress, her cheeks glowing, her hair a little ruffled with exercise, a pleasant picture of health and enjoyment; he in his close-fitting flannel suit, moving with the slow and easy grace of a Greek athlete, whose statuesque pallor is scarcely flushed by his exertions.

"Lord and Lady Windermere. She is my mother's cousin. They are dull, and they are poor—they have every fault people can possibly have."

Miss Johnstone laughed; but her laugh had not its accustomed joyous ring.

"You value people for their riches and for the amusement they can afford you, then? Who else is there?"

"Well, there is a woman who will afford us amusement, at all events—Mrs. Latour, a connection of my father's. She is an awful fool, and her blunders are the delight of society. When I last saw her she told me her son was grown as tall as a steeple-chaser!"

"I'm sure you invented that," laughed Catherine. "But you have not named all the guests, for I heard Lady Davenport say she expected six or seven."

"Let me see, there is Medway, our county member, who won't interest you, and Sir Charles Wilverly, and two or three other fellows, I believe, and Mrs. Hare, whom people are awfully afraid of—she is so satirical; but she is very good fun sometimes. She is separated from old Hare, but my mother is a tremendous supporter of hers; believes she is an injured saint, and won't hear a word against her. She's a poetess, you know. I suppose you have read her books?"

"No. I never read poetry, except Macaulay's 'Lays.' I do like them—don't you?"

"You musn't talk to me about books, Miss Johnstone. I'm awfully ignorant."

"But I suppose you read something? What do you read?"

"'Bell's Life.'"

This young man's talent, properly applied, might have produced an able diplomatist or tactician. He had a singularly quick perception of character, and not alone the power of calculating the effect of his words beforehand, which may be said to belong to a certain degraded form of genius, but the boldness to act upon his convictions. It was marvelous how thoroughly—up to the point where a corrupt nature can see no further—he understood Catherine, at the end of their fortnight's acquaintance. Nothing could have pleased her better than the blunt confession of ignorance from this Adonis. There was something—something else besides her money then—in which she was not immeasurably his inferior! His physical charms affected her so strangely, that she always felt as though they must be made of different clay. His smile, his voice, in repose; his grace

and muscular strength in action, equally fascinated her. It is humiliating for me to write it: she was fairly dazzled by the man's superficial charms, and she was constantly saying to herself, "How is it possible he should ever think of me? If he did, it would only be for my money. He has everything else, and what have I?"

But now that she heard him confess to reading nothing but "Bell's Life," the distance between them seemed lessened. Perhaps beautiful young Englishmen always disliked books.

Seeing that she made no response, he continued presently:

"Wilverly is just the sort of man you will like. He is awfully clever."

"Cleverness doesn't make people pleasant."

"But he is pleasant. In spite of his knowing such an awful lot, there is no denying that he is very good company, when Mrs. Hare is not by."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why she snuffs him out completely: he listens to her in silence. He is one of those sort of fellows you hear every one speak well of—I should like to know the sensation, for once in my life, of being well-spoken of."

"I suspect that, on the contrary, you get only too much flattery," said Catherine with a smile. "But a man's being well-spoken of wouldn't affect my liking. I form my own judgment of people without regard to public opinion."

"It isn't possible. You can't help it. A reprobate, like myself, knows the value of public opinion. Every one, beginning with my own family, will abuse me, if you ask what they think of me."

"I don't believe you—but I shall not ask them," replied the girl quickly. They were on the steps of the hall-door, as she said this, and passed on without another word into the dining-room.

CHAPTER VII.

SOME of the guests arrived together from London by a train which deposited them at the station between six and seven o'clock. Mr. Medway, the county member, who drove from his country-seat, fifteen miles distant, was the only one of the party whose acquaintance Catherine Johnstone made in the library at tea-time. She examined him critically, unbiased by Roger's summary dismissal of the member's pretensions to "interest:" but after the first five minutes she felt that the insolent Adonis was right. The man was under fifty, tall and able-bodied, possessed of a certain ponderous ability for grappling with blue-books, and generally well looked upon as "a sound man." He was, moreover, a bachelor, of large means, and consequently regarded with especial favor by the fathers and mothers of marriageable daughters: but, for all this, Catherine felt, as she listened to the dull sound of his voice—a voice that had no inflections in it—and watched the movement of his heavy jaw, and slow apprehension of his eyes, that he could never "interest" her, in the smallest degree. The words that fell from his lips were words of wisdom, and Roger's were often words of folly; but the folly had the power of arresting her attention, while the wisdom

permitted it to wander; striking upon the sense like the faint reverberation of a sound, already echoed over and over again.

The guests assembled before dinner in the "saloon," a long yellow satin room, with mirrors, a few pieces of blue china, a very terrible statue of "Flora," purchased by Sir Norman's father in Italy sixty years ago, and a yet more offensive malachite table, presented to that baronet by an Emperor of Russia. No wonder Lady Davenport preferred the shabby comfort and harmonious tone of the library: in fact, who, in his heart, did not? But it was the correct thing that the saloon should be used for company; and Lady Davenport, good and clever as she was, was a Philistine. So the brown holland in which the room had been so long swathed was reft away, and fifteen people, who would have sunk down into the old cushions of the library comfortably enough, sat in chill stateliness on the yellow satin ottomans and chairs, scarcely conscious how far their well-being and genial intercourse were affected by the moral atmosphere of their surroundings.

Catherine Johnstone, thanks to Lady Davenport, was well dressed, for the first time in her life, and her appearance repaid the care that had been bestowed on it. She was a fine creature, and the little exuberance which was unduly accentuated by brilliant attire, when toned down by a harmonious sobriety of colors, did not militate against her meeting with a fair share of honest admiration, especially from men. Mr. Medway looked at her in a comprehensive way, and, after mature deliberation, said—much as he might have done of a cow—that she was well built and had a good head. Lord Windermere told Sir Norman that, heiress or not, she was a devilish good-looking girl.

"The Johnstones are a good-looking race—distant cousins of mine, you know."

"Oh! Indeed? Really? I thought that—" and here Lord Windermere, whose ideas could seldom express themselves, stopped short. Sir Charles Wilverly, who was by—for this took place over the wine when the ladies had retired—murmured sotto voce, "*Où avez-vous pêché cette cousine-là, mon cher?*"

Sir Norman, laughing, replied, "Never mind. *Ce n'est pas un pêché mortel.*"

Of the two or three other men assembled nothing need be said; they came and they went, and others came and went, some with wives and some without; but they do not cross the main path of this narrative. It was all so new to Catherine Johnstone, that the most colorless object in this background afforded her some amusement or material for speculation. Lord Windermere was the first peer she had ever beheld. Of him, and of his excellent wife, she wrote in her diary—"Mr. Davenport was right, they certainly are very dull. She was most kind to me, but did not even attempt to converse. She sat smiling on the sofa beside me, murmuring, 'How nice for you to be with dear Lady Davenport!' And I replied that it was nice; and then she varied the phrase, and thought that nothing could be nicer—indeed, it was very nice for her, also—it was a nice arrangement for both parties—and so on. As to Lord Windermere, if the Upper House is composed of many such men, it is a potent argument for the abolition of hereditary dignities. I sup-

pose no such person could be elected by a constituency, to represent their interests and to legislate. He would not at Melbourne, at any rate. Mrs. Latour amused me, immensely. She is a tall pretty woman, with one of the silliest faces, and the most self-conscious manner I ever met. I doubt her ever forgetting herself, and her beautiful clothes, and the effect she believes she is creating, for a single moment. Her blunders *à la Malaprop* are really less entertaining than her vanity. When she heard that I hunted she exclaimed, 'Ah! it must be delightful to hunt! But the world would talk if I did it. It is so hard, but that is the penalty one pays for personal appearance.' And the fun of it was that I am sure she had not the least idea she was saying a rude thing!"

But though she was well amused that evening, the only person who really interested Catherine was Mrs. Hare; and toward her she felt irresistibly drawn, in spite of all Lady Retford's innuendoes.

She was no longer in her first youth, but still brilliantly handsome, with a classical regularity of feature seldom combined with varied expression; passion, humor, satire, and—sometimes, but very rarely—tenderness, gleaming and flashing through the veiled light of her long-lashed eyes. She could be extremely amusing; no one told a story so well, or could be so quietly satirical; and none more generous and unstinting in recognition of pleasant social qualities in others. But she was a dangerous enemy; eloquent in attack of tyranny (especially domestic tyranny); ever ready to protect the oppressed; burning and bitter in her scorn, and very unforgiving of injuries. Where she chose to exercise her charm, it was scarcely possible to resist it, even in the face of things said and done which good taste might regret, and judgment disapprove. It was such influence as this that she possessed over Lady Davenport. Two women more diametrically opposed in every way, it would have been difficult to find. But having originally taken up her cause, with a strong feeling that injustice had been done Mrs. Hare, the power of the generous, passionate, brilliantly endowed woman over the wise and well-regulated mind of the other was great. And this was the more remarkable, inasmuch as Lady Davenport had no keen appreciation of her genius, or sympathy with her views. She often deplored her friend's witticisms, which, indeed, had occasionally a flavor of coarseness; but she never for a moment listened to the scandal which associated Mrs. Hare's name with that of her old, tried friend, Sir Charles Wilverly. And to prove her belief in the innocence of this friendship, she had invited them here together. The support of so immaculate a woman had proved a tower of strength to Mrs. Hare before this; and had been recognized with gratitude in the dedication of a volume of verse to Lady Davenport. Lady Retford might chuckle over it all, and whistle, and shake her head: the presence of Mrs. Hare, as a guest of her sister-in-law, testified to that lady's conviction that, though possibly unwise, the object of so much gossip, jealousy, and dread was maligned by the world in general.

She sat opposite Catherine at dinner; and the two women watched each other, from time to time, with mutual pleasure. The girl's intelligence and fresh geniality, her healthy organization, and unconventional manner, appealed strongly to the poetess, who was also

a woman of the world; while Catherine's admiration of the beautiful face, and her delight at some humorous anecdote, delivered with down dropped lids by a low musical voice for the benefit of that end of the table, were not thrown away upon Mrs. Hare.

"That girl is like a pleasant sea-wind," she said to Sir Charles, next her. "I feel her invigorating effect across the table—full of salt and freshness."

"Flattery is not supposed to be invigorating," replied her neighbor, with a smile. "And that girl has been flattering you silently, ever since the beginning of dinner."

Mrs. Hare smiled. "She is much too good for Roger, I am sure. I hope she won't be victimized."

"It doesn't look much like it. Do you see him at the other end of the table, how he is turning the head of that little woman with the fuzzy gold hair? I am told that no woman can resist Roger's eyes when he looks down into her face in that way."

"How can you talk such stuff! a barber's block like that."

"Ah, you haven't been tried. He has never looked down into your face in that way."

* * * * *

After dinner, Mrs. Hare made Catherine at once sit down beside her, and they talked for some time. It was never difficult to win the girl's confidence; hers was a singularly frank nature; and in the course of a quarter of an hour she had told her new acquaintance enough of herself to strengthen the interest with which she had already inspired Mrs. Hare. To find that this colonially educated girl had read so widely, and had conceived so vivid a picture of much that had come to her through books alone, was a revelation to one who was accustomed to consider the young ladies of society as thinking-machines of a limited capacity: producing more or less material after an orthodox and conventional manner.

Catherine was struck by what seemed to her a curious coincidence that evening. After conversing some time, Mrs. Hare said:

"What do you think of the men here? There is no one with any brains but Sir Charles Wilverly, and that tutor."

"Mr. Davenport is not a reading man, but he has plenty of brains," was Catherine's reply.

"They are brains that are of no good to any one. I am tolerant of scamps in general, but I have no patience with Roger Davenport. He has given his poor mother such anxiety, and now—"

At this moment Lady Davenport, who had left Lady Windermere's side and crossed the room, came up to ask Mrs. Hare a question. Catherine rose and went up to Mrs. Courtland, who, since the ladies had come into the drawing-room, had been left alone to turn over a photograph-book. This isolation, though probably intentional, was not marked; inasmuch as there were eight ladies, disposed in couples, and Mrs. Courtland was the solitary ninth. But Catherine's kind nature (which is, to high breeding, as the sketch to the finished picture) impelled her to go and talk to the apparently neglected lady, now that her own conversation with Mrs. Hare was interrupted:

Almost the first words Mrs. Courtland said were,

"Do tell me what you think of Mr. Davenport."

"I think him very handsome, as every one must."

"And with such refinement! such a perfect gentleman!"

"Yes—he is very gentleman-like."

"We are immense friends, you know. I take the deepest interest in him. I am always telling him he ought to marry."

"Ought he?" was Catherine's rather stupid rejoinder: but, indeed, she was nearly dumb with astonishment.

"Yes; and the world is so hard upon him—his own mother—every one:" here her manner became nervous, and she spoke very fast. "He has been over to me several times since he came, and I have given him no end of good advice. I hope you'll be kind to him. He—he thinks a great deal of you; he says you are so very sensible and so clever, and—and it would be such a good thing for him to have a—a friend like you."

Catherine's amazement was tinged with indignation. Was it possible that she misunderstood Mrs. Courtland's implication? At all events, whatever the nature of Roger's feeling for this little woman, or hers for him, Catherine had no fancy to be made the subject of conversation between them, the line, apparently, being that of cautious commendation on the one side, and worldly advice on the other.

How she would have replied it is difficult to say; but the men had come in from the dining-room; Lord Windermere and Mr. Medway joined them, and then, a little later, Roger Davenport. He never left Mrs. Courtland's side the whole evening. They went into the billiard-room together, ostensibly to play a game, but Catherine and one of the young men of the party entering a quarter of an hour later, found Mrs. Courtland lying back on a settee, with closed eyes, and pale as death, and Roger standing over her with a glass of water.

"She has fainted," he said slowly, "but I didn't want to make a fuss; have you any salts? She'll be all right in a few minutes."

"Fan her while I run and fetch some sal-volatile. Open that window, Mr. Brown," and the girl flew to her room.

Mrs. Courtland revived under these restoratives before very long, and returned to the drawing-room by the time her carriage was announced, looking, indeed, very pale, but with no other evidence of agitation or indisposition.

"How kind you have been to me!" she whispered, squeezing Catherine's hand. "I am so grateful, I don't know what I should have done alone with only these horrid hard women, if it had not been for you. I feel very giddy and weak still. Won't you come over, and see how I am to-morrow?"

And Catherine promised she would.

In her diary that night occurred the following passage:

"I can not make this little woman out at all. I never met with any one like her; that is not surprising, but I can not recall any position in a book similar to that of Roger and herself, as it appears to me. Does she care about him seriously: or is it only what she seems to wish me to believe, a deep friendly interest that she feels for him? Certainly, upon any other hypothesis, it seems difficult to understand her praising him to me in the very marked manner she

did to-night. That she could not feel jealous of me under any circumstances, that I understand; but that she should apparently wish to throw us in each other's way, and, unless I mistook her strangely, suggest the idea of a marriage between us, this passes my comprehension. How restless, how excitable, and how very fragile she looks. As she lay there white and still, I thought I understood how the feverish troubled spirit was wearing and tearing its poor little tenement to pieces. Mr. Davenport looked at me with a very strange expression, an expression I found it difficult to read satisfactorily, as I stood beside the sofa on which she lay; it was almost deprecatory; it seemed to say, 'I can't help it; you see the sort of woman she is—is it my fault?' Of course I may be wrong, and his face may have meant nothing of what I fancied it indicated; but it left a painful impression on my mind."

She drove over to Brookwood the following day, but she took Mrs. Hare with her. That lady had resisted at first.

"I feel no interest whatever in Mrs. Courtland—and as to her fainting fits, I fancy they come on very conveniently whenever they are wanted. But if you wish to go, Miss Johnstone—"

"I do; indeed I must go, for I promised to do so."

Their visit was very short. Mrs. Courtland seemed quite well again, and in brilliant spirits. She was full of her ball, which was to take place on New Year's-day. She expected two hundred people; her presents for the cotillon were all coming from Paris; the supper was to be at small round tables in the conservatory, and the park was to be lighted up. She was still on this subject when Mr. Roger Davenport was announced, and Mrs. Hare immediately rose.

"I am afraid it will be dark before we get home," she said.

"Mind you make Lady Davenport come early to the ball," was Mrs. Courtland's last injunction to Catherine; "and I hope she is going to bring lots of dancing men."

"Mountjoy and Charley Thane are coming, and one or two others, I believe," said Roger, as he held the door open for the two ladies to pass out.

"That woman and Roger Davenport are very well matched," said Mrs. Hare, as they drove home.

Catherine was silent.

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHERE is Miss Johnstone? Has any one seen her?"

The speaker was Lady Davenport; the hour twelve o'clock. She entered the drawing-room where all the ladies, except Mrs. Hare, who was supposed to be in the throes of literary composition upstairs, were seated at work. Lady Retford answered with a laugh,

"My dear, I believe you'll find her in the billiard-room playing with the men. We were too dull for her. She actually talked of walking out in the pouring rain; but I observed that all the men took their exercise, such a day as this, round the billiard-table, and she instantly left the room. He! he!"

"I should have liked so much to have gone too!" cried Mrs. Latour, raising her inane, pretty face from a sunflower—"only I

don't play billiards, and the smell of smoke makes me sick—and I don't think it perhaps was quite nice to go and sit there, though I should so have liked it. But I am so afraid of being talked about. *Noblesse oblige.*"

Lady Davenport smiled, but made no reply, as she left the library.

Lady Retford had divined correctly. Her sister-in-law, opening the door of the billiard-room, beheld Catherine through a cloud of smoke with a cue in her hand playing, not indeed with all the men, but with one, and that one her son, Roger. There was nothing remarkable in this; he had played lawn-tennis with Miss Johnstone every morning. But the door had opened noiselessly; and her son's back was turned toward the door, as Lady Davenport entered. He was speaking; and what she heard was this:—

"Ah! but no good women will have anything to say to me, so I am obliged to comfort myself with—those who will."

He turned sharp round, as the rustle of his mother's dress caught his ear, and, for once in his life, he colored. She said in her calm, deliberate way to Catherine,

"When you have done your game, will you come to my boudoir for a few minutes before luncheon, Miss Johnstone?"

Catherine, wholly unperturbed by the presence of her ladyship, made a capital stroke, and then, as she stood erect, said, with a radiant face,

"Certainly—I shall have beaten Mr. Davenport in ten minutes (of course, you know, he gave me 25)—and then I'll come to you, Lady Davenport."

As soon as the door had closed upon his mother, Roger, who was chalking his cue, said softly, without looking up,

"You will see if I wasn't right in what I said yesterday."

"What about?"

"My family's abusing me. My mother'll do it to you—see if she doesn't."

"How can you talk so, Mr. Davenport! You seem to believe in nobody. I am sure your mother wouldn't say a word that wasn't—wasn't—"

"True—that is what you mean; and you are quite right. She is very fond of me too, poor soul, only she doesn't understand me. I am really not as bad as she thinks. I have been in every sort of scrape; but I think there are allowances to be made for me. She can't make allowances; she is awfully severe, like most good people, I suppose."

"Don't say that; it isn't true. I dare say she is very anxious about you, that I can well understand, and from your own admission she has cause."

"Yes—but she doesn't see that influence—the right woman's influence—might make a different man of me."

Catherine opened her mouth to reply; but she checked herself in time. Her impetuosity might have landed her in a difficulty. As it was, she played a bad stroke, and Roger, with a cannon, won the game after all.

"You only won by a fluke," she said, as she laid down her cue with a smile.

He lit another cigar when she had left the room, and stood with

his legs apart, and his back to the fire, leaning his shoulders against the mantel-piece, and seeing far more through his half-shut eyes than the green-baize table upon which they rested.

"If I win, it will be by a fluke; and if I lose—what then?"

Lady Davenport sat at her escritoire, which was covered with letters, bills, and memoranda of various kinds. It was, as Catherine had observed on her first visit to the room, one in which the graces of life had not been allowed much liberty to disport themselves. A chalk head of Lady Davenport's mother by Sir Thomas Lawrence was the only work of art upon the walls. There were several bookshelves, a map of the estate, and some plans for farm-buildings which had been projected and were sorely needed, but, for lack of funds, had never yet been carried out. A photograph of Roger, a most favorable likeness, with his beautiful head seen in three-quarters, and his long lithe limbs gracefully indolent in knickerbockers, stood on the table before her. A well-worn carpet covered the floor, and a good fire burned in the grate, before which a black and tan terrier lay curled up. She half opened an eye, and raised one ear almost imperceptibly as Catherine entered; but observing that the event was one upon which apparently neither chicken-bones nor a scamper in the wet grass were contingent, she considered it beneath her serious notice, and relapsed into a doze.

"Come in, Miss Johnstone," said Lady Davenport, rising, and going toward the fire-place. "Sit here on the sofa by me, will you? I want to have a little quiet talk with you. I feel there are certain things that I, standing as it were in the light of a mother to you now, should warn you about. One is against forming any intimacy with Mrs. Courtland. You drove over there yesterday. I was sorry for it. Her conduct displeased me exceedingly the other night; it is certainly the last time I shall ask her here. I had no idea—however, my son was equally to blame. I don't mean to exonerate him."

Catherine waited for a minute, before she said, "You see, Lady Davenport, every one is very hard upon your son, and Mrs. Courtland is sympathetic and kind. She may not be a wise friend, I dare say not, but I don't think she means any harm."

Lady Davenport did not reply to this *quasi* defense of Mrs. Courtland. She bit her lip; and passed on to the yet more painful part of her task.

"What you say of Roger brings me to speak of him to you, which I do—you may well believe—with great reluctance. Though I am his mother and very fond of him, I can not be blind to his faults. You seem to pity him—you talk of every one being hard on him. I assure you his father has been more than indulgent. Roger has contrived to interest you as he does most women. He has been very much spoiled by women of Mrs. Courtland's stamp. Of course I know there is no real feeling on either side—it is purely vanity—but it is not the less mischievous. His ideas about our sex and about marriage distress me very much at present. I hope it will not always be so. I hope some day he will fall in love honestly and marry; but that will not be till he is disgusted with his present life."

"I think he is already disgusted," said Catherine.

Lady Davenport shook her head.

"He has no strength to resist temptation. He makes no effort to redeem the past. You will think it odd, perhaps, my saying all this to you, but I have not done so without deliberation."

"He told me you would do so," said Catherine, with a smile.

Lady Davenport started, and a faint color rose to her pale cheek.

"He told you so?" she repeated. "It is well, then, that I have spoken. I am reserved, as you see, Miss Johnstone. I make no confidences; and I talk as little about my neighbors' concerns as about those of my own family—in general. But since my eldest son seems disposed to remain at home for the present, it is right that I should warn you. He is terribly in debt; and as it is impossible that his father can help him any more, I feel sure—though he has never said so to me—that if he could find any girl with a large fortune foolish enough to accept him he would not scruple to marry her, however little he cared about her. That is the code of the set to which he belongs—it is not thought cruel, or dishonorable. I think it both. Such a marriage would make me wretched."

The blood had slowly mounted to Catherine's cheek. She looked straight at the map of the estate on the wall opposite, as she said, in rather a hard voice,

"And you think that I might be foolish enough to marry him, though I knew he did not care about me?"

"I am afraid that he might make you believe that he did," replied Lady Davenport in a low tone.

The girl remained silent for a minute, her gaze still fixed upon the map. Then she turned the clear brown eyes full upon Lady Davenport, and said quickly,

"Thank you for the warning; but I fancy your fears are groundless as regards your son. I never have seen anything to make me believe that he had any such design as you suspect. He has never dropped a word that could lead me to suppose it."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad." Lady Davenport spoke less composedly than usual; and her fingers twitched a little, as they lay folded in her lap. "I hope it may continue thus. At all events, it is better you should know the truth as regards Roger at the very outset. You must trust to nothing he says about himself, poor boy! Perhaps he deceives himself—perhaps he will try and deceive you. He will tell you he is the victim of circumstances, and so on—that we do not understand him. What can I say? It is hard for a mother to speak against her own son. Nothing would make me do so but the peculiar circumstances in which I am placed toward you. He wishes to be on friendly terms with you, and I can not discourage it—I, who desire the society of good women for my son. I can only warn you. He told you I should do so, because—he knows how I feel on certain subjects. I need say no more."

Presently Catherine observed abruptly,

"I suppose you will go to Mrs. Courtland's ball?"

"I can hardly avoid it, having promised to bring a party to it; but I shall see as little as possible of her in future. She is—to say the least of it—the worst possible style, and I regret exceedingly her being so near a neighbor."

"I do not know what is good style and what is bad," said Cath-

erine with a smile. "I suppose bad style is what men like, and good is what neglected women prefer. Is Mrs. Latour good style?"

"She is an exceedingly silly, vain, half-educated woman, but she is quite harmless in the sense in which Mrs. Courtland is not, I fear. She is a cousin of Sir Norman's, and therefore I felt bound to ask her here once for Christmas."

"Of all your guests, Mrs. Hare is the one I like best. She is so good to me—and so amusing and interesting—but Lady Retford says—"

"Pray don't listen to what my sister-in-law says. A woman separated from her husband is always in a false position—and Mrs. Hare has, unfortunately, no worldly wisdom. She says and does things which are sure to make her enemies. I am very fond of her; she has a fine, generous nature, and she has been hardly dealt with. Therefore I have always stood by her; but you must not suppose that I approve of her altogether—no. And her very brilliancy makes her a dangerous example. Pray remember that."

"Having no brilliancy, I do not feel there is any danger," laughed Catherine. "The only thing in her I find infectious, is her enthusiasm for what is noble, her scorn for what is base, her compassion for, and desire to help, what is suffering."

Then the two ladies went down to the library together.

CHAPTER IX.

CHRISTMAS came and passed, during which Catherine's acquaintance with Mrs. Hare ripened into intimacy, as it sometimes does in a country-house, where affinity or repulsion is quickly manifested. Miss Johnstone liked the society of the keen-witted poetess better than that of any one of the party; except the person whom she felt herself constrained, in a certain degree, to avoid. And, in society, Roger did not make any very obvious efforts to converse with her. He generally contrived, however, more than once in the course of each day, that they should be together for a few minutes alone; and Mrs. Hare became cognizant of these apparently accidental meetings, in the shrubbery, or on the staircase, or in the stable, where Catherine frequently went to visit her horses. But for Lady Davenport's warning, it is certain that the girl, in her unconventional freedom, would have expressed a desire for billiards or lawn-tennis every morning. As it was, she talked to Mr. Medway or Lord Windermere with some attempt at interest, whenever Roger entered the room, and twice sat down by Mrs. Hare on the sofa, when the young man's eyes had invited her to a fauteuil at the opposite side of the fire. After these sacrifices, what further could be required of her? Could she help it, if he followed her to the stable, or the conservatory?

Mrs. Hare's beautiful velvet eyes noted all these things.

It was New Year's-day; and here was rain again. No one stirred out all the morning. The gong for luncheon brought the scattered party together. Mrs. Hare, who sat near Catherine, let fall, in her low silvery voice, some acute remarks on things in general, with the air of not perceiving their application in particular. At last,

"I fancy you are not likely to mind a little rain?" she said, as they rose. "Shall we go out, in spite of it? If any of the men choose to join us, they can; but we will not be dependent on them."

"I never am," returned the girl, laughing.

"Ah!" ejaculated Mrs. Hare, languidly, with a little mocking smile. "It never does to boast. I hear you fell into a ditch the other day."

"Who told you? Mr. Holroyd, I suppose?"

"No, that willowy boy—less to be depended on, of the two—in a ditch, at all events."

"I was brought up to be independent of every one. If I had been alone, I should have leaped the ditch all right. It was these horrid petticoats—and the two men watching me."

The earnestness with which Catherine spoke, so unnecessary to the occasion, made Mrs. Hare, who was seldom more than half in earnest in conversation, smile again.

"It is men watching us, my dear, that causes half our troubles in life. I wish one could forget them; but one can't. We are always trying to look nice before them—thinking about our petticoats, in short."

"I'm more afraid of women than men, as a rule," returned Catherine. "When they look one all over, it makes one feel uncomfortable: I know they're criticising something. In short, I'm afraid I like men best."

Mrs. Hare leaned forward, and whispered, "Don't breathe it again, but so do I."

A quarter of an hour later, the two ladies, in their ulsters, appeared in the hall. Most of the party were still hanging about, meditating how to kill the wet afternoon. Mrs. Latour raised her bangled arms and dropped them on her embroidered skirts, with a pretty affectation of amazement.

"Going out, such a day as this! Why, it is pouring!"

"Is it? Miss Johnstone and I are possessed with the demon of restlessness."

"Possessed with a demon? Oh! Mrs. Hare! And then there is the ball to-night. You'll get red noses in the cold wind."

"They say that noses are worn red in Paris, now—'Avec cette robe on porte une figure de saison—le nez rouge.'"

"Oh! You don't mean that? I can't believe it. I am always so careful to powder my nose, if there is the least frost—particularly in the country. It is never so cold in the Necropolis."

"I should have expected it to be very cold there," replied Mrs. Hare, demurely, "but certainly one would not require powder."

There was a little suppressed titter, of which Mrs. Latour remained wholly unconscious: and the two ladies passed out under the porch.

Mrs. Hare was really much interested in Catherine by this time, and felt that a stage had been reached in their intimacy, when she might, and indeed, ought, to give her a friendly warning.

"How long have you been here now?" she began.

"Nearly two months."

"Has Roger Davenport been here all that time?"

"Oh, dear no—not more than three weeks."

"It is very seldom he remains at home so long. Have you any idea what keeps him here?"

"How can I tell? There has not been a party here for a long time. I suppose he is amused."

"He has an object in most that he does. His flirtation with Mrs. Courtland is only a blind. I see through him."

"Do you?" said Catherine, walking straight on, without looking at her companion. "I am not so clever."

"You are not so old, my dear, and don't know men as I do. He wants to enlist your sympathy—your interest—to make you believe that your influence might reform him—that he is longing to break away from the chain of Mrs. Courtland's fascination, and that since he has known you, he sees that you may be his salvation—if you choose. Many girls are not proof against this sort of flattery; but I should be grieved if you yielded to it."

"Why is it impossible it should be true?" returned the girl, simply. "No one will ever fall desperately in love with me—I know that; but supposing that Mr. Davenport became, by degrees, attached to me—supposing he gave proof of the strength of this attachment by an altered life—supposing he did break away from—from—all his old habits, why should I not believe him?"

"In the first place, he will not break away from his old habits: he may pretend to do so, but he will not. And even if he were to do so, for a time, I should not believe in him. I should feel sure that he would slide back again, as soon as he had secured what he wanted."

"What right has one to say that of any human being?" returned Catherine, bluntly.

"My dear, I have known him since he was a boy; and I have very quick instincts—sort of antennæ, which detect at once what is antagonistic to my nature, when I come into contact with it. Roger is irredeemably bad."

"But Mr. Davenport may be antagonistic to *you*, without being irredeemably bad?"

"Very smartly said, my dear; that emphasis upon the *you* was neat. Indeed, I have liked many a *vaurien*; but he must have heart. I don't care what his vices and follies are, if he is capable of caring for some one very much. Roger Davenport is not."

"Perhaps—" then she stopped short.

"You were going to say, perhaps he has not come across the right person yet? No; and, believe me, he never will. There will be a succession of Mrs. Courtlands—there will never be a deep life-long attachment. Let my experience be a warning. I was sanguine and imaginative, as you are, when I was a girl—"

"I am not imaginative," interrupted Catherine quickly.

"Well, you are attracted by good looks, and invest the possessor of them with qualities, perhaps, he has no claim to. I did so, when I married, and my life was ruined in consequence. I thought I was going to reform a profligate—it would have ended in my becoming—ah! well, I will not say what—if I had not separated from him. But you see what the result is? Do you think it is pleasant to be maligned, as I am?—to have no one to support or defend me in any difficulty? to be unable to marry, and yet to have no hus-

band? Because I have spirits that rise in society, perhaps you think I am indifferent? It is not so—take warning by me—marry the veriest lout in the world, if you can respect him—or, at least, if he has a heart. But make no delusions to yourself. Marriage won't change the man who has not one generous or unselfish feeling."

The passionate woman's nostril was dilated, and her lip quivered, as she spoke; and it was characteristic of her, that having been led to the utmost limits of what it was discreet to confide to a comparative stranger, and that stranger a girl, she presently exceeded those limits in reply to Catherine's remark that "perhaps love was a series of delusions on both sides," when she said:

"The question is, do the delusions last? If they do, they become realities to you. If you can regard your husband, or your friend, with the same feelings, after some years of companionship or close intimacy, never mind if they are delusions; never mind if what appears to you deep and thoughtful, charming or heroic, the world considers very commonplace. What does it signify? without some delusions, life would be insupportable."

"Yes, but people change their delusions." Catherine was glad to shift the ground of discussion; and did not see whither her objection led.

"The less they do so the happier for themselves. I have a friend of fifteen years' standing—Sir Charles Wilverly. We have neither of us changed our delusions. I believe he has a conviction that I am the most delightful woman in the world, and I am under the impression that he has a fine mind, a noble character, and that he would go through fire and water to serve me. Of course I know what the world says. Of course, if I valued its opinion more than my friend, I should see less of him. As it is, I value my friend most. I consider him of more importance in my life. Perhaps that is my delusion, but I hope to retain it."

"I hope you may. I begin to think the world is monstrously hard upon every one."

"Yes, and this is the only question to ask one's self in disregarding its opinion, 'Is this thing worth the sacrifice?' Many so-called friendships are not. I think mine is."

No doubt this was hardly the language to hold to a young woman, unsophisticated in the world's ways, and whose independence of character would naturally lead her to resist its unjust decrees. Possibly Mrs. Hare's quick perceptions had made her foresee that she would find ready sympathy in Catherine: possibly she had been led on by her gift of fluent utterance to speak of herself, whereas she had only meant, in the beginning, to speak of Roger. However this may be, Catherine was completely won over. She told Mrs. Hare that if she had a friend, she would certainly not give him up, on account of anything the world might say. She had just announced this spirited sentiment, when they entered the Long Walk from a side path, and found themselves face to face with Malcolm and Mr. Holroyd.

The Long Walk was a straight alley, cut through a wood of old Scotch firs, whose network of branches was so closely interwoven, as to be almost impervious to the rain. The sandy foot-way, thickly carpeted with pine-needles, was as dry as at midsummer.

Malcolm sprung forward. "Is it not beautiful here?—like a cathedral—so still and solemn, with the rain driving through the woods outside? Oh! Mrs. Hare, what a charming ulster! so *chic*! You are coming to walk with us, ain't you?"

Holroyd raised two fingers to his hat, in Austrian-military fashion, and stood still to let the ladies pass.

Mrs. Hare shook the heavy drops from her umbrella, and closed it, saying:

"It is quite dry here: we can take a quarter-deck walk, up and down."

The path was narrow: it would have been difficult for three to walk abreast: Mrs. Hare and Malcolm went forward, and Catherine found herself beside Holroyd. She could not pass him without a word: she could not but give him the option of walking beside her, should he be so minded. If he chose to remain rigid and unbending, it should not be her fault: she, at least, would not be uncivil.

"Are you coming to the ball to-night, Mr. Holroyd?"

"Lady Davenport has signified her wish that I should go."

"But you had rather not, I suppose? You despise such frivolous amusements?"

"I used to be fond of dancing once. Now it is different. I have not been inside a ball-room for years."

"Well, you will begin again to-night? You don't mean to say you think yourself too old to dance?"

"I don't think about it. If I wanted very much to dance, I should do so. I suppose some one would take pity on me. Happily I have no desire to put their good-nature to that test."

"Well, for my part, I think it would only be civil if you asked me to dance with you."

Her kind heart prompted this unconventional rejoinder, for she fancied there was a tinge of bitterness in his speech. She was wrong: the man was inordinately proud; but there was no disposition to complain of the position he voluntarily occupied. He colored; and replied, without looking at her,

"You are very good, but I hope I have too much knowledge of the world to intrude myself on the domain of others. You will be surrounded by younger and more appropriate partners in every respect."

She was piqued: he ought to have jumped at her gracious proposal.

"So you refuse? No one would have done so to me in Melbourne. *There* they would call it very ill-mannered, Mr. Holroyd."

"And I dare say they would be right. But my bad manners should be a sufficient reason for your not dancing with me. You come here to make acquaintance with the polished society of England. It would be a mistake to waste your time on me, Miss Johnstone."

There was something in his thoughts—something which she felt to be contemptuous in his tone—which she dimly apprehended.

"If I choose to make that mistake, you are not the one who should remind me of it. I think you are a very ill-natured man. I am a stranger here, and you are much older than I am, and know

the world. You might be of great use to me in many ways, but—”

“I? How can I possibly be of use to you?”

“By telling me things I am ignorant of. By giving me an honest opinion when I want one. But no; instead of that, you snub me whenever I speak to you. Of course I know that my conversation couldn’t possibly interest you—that you look upon me as little better than a barbarian, who has no knowledge of the world, but what she had gained through a little reading. But you might occasionally stoop from your superior heights of wisdom, and talk to me, instead of remaining stiff and glum, as you do.”

For once he looked confused.

“You have surely quite mistaken our positions. You came here with an object in view which you will, no doubt, speedily attain. The world you covet will be at your feet. How can the opinion or advice of a man who does not belong to this fine society benefit you? If I told you it was rotten—that it worshiped nothing but the golden calf, would you believe me? You would reply justly, that I knew nothing of it. If you were a young man, I could be of use to you, for I know men well, and the dangers that beset them. A young lady I can not help—any attempt to do so would be looked upon as intrusive and impertinent.”

“By whom, pray?”

“By those, perhaps, whose opinion I am bound to consider.”

Catherine waited for two or three minutes before she said anything. They walked on in silence. Mrs. Hare and Malcolm had gained ground on them, and were quite out of ear-shot.

“Mr. Holroyd, will you answer a question, if I ask you? It is only one of opinion—it compromises no one.”

“Let me hear what it is.”

“You have a contempt for me—I see it—because I want to go into a society to which I don’t belong—which I wasn’t born into. Is it not very natural? Why should you despise me? If I can open the door with my money, why shouldn’t I look in, and see if it isn’t more amusing than the stupid society I have been used to hitherto?”

“If you sought the company of people better or cleverer than those you have known, I should commend you. As it is, I confess that I have no sympathy with your desire to enter into fashionable life. I dare say it is natural: everything struggles to get at the top nowadays: perhaps if I thought it was *really* ‘the top’ of the only ladder I care to scale, I should struggle too. As it is, the conversations I occasionally hear do not inspire me with any lively ambition to penetrate further into the circle you are anxious to enter. So much as this I will acknowledge.”

“You are a man, and have knocked about the world. It is all new to me. How am I to know what I prefer, if I don’t see as much as I can? It sounds very fine to talk about my seeking the company of people better and cleverer than I am, but how am I to set about it? The first man I find who is cleverer (whether he is better or not is another matter) distinctly avoids me—will have nothing at all to say to me. Fashionable society may be very bad, but at all events, the men who belong to it don’t behave like that.”

“No; and if their company satisfies you, what can you want more?” A sarcastic smile played round his mouth as he uttered the

words. Then he grew grave. "Accident has brought us to live in the same house together," he continued. "You would injure the cause you have at present at heart, Miss Johnstone, that of 'getting on' in the world, of becoming a fashionable young lady—if we were upon other than distant terms. I am regarded by the gilded youths who will soon be flocking round you—"

"You mean the youths who want to be gilded."

"As not belonging exactly to the same species as themselves. They are gauzy little moths—and I, a tough old horse-fly. They can not wound me as long as I keep to myself, and do not attempt to touch their fruit and flowers. If I showed any disposition to do so, they would set all the wasps upon me—and I should deserve my fate."

Mrs. Hare and Malcolm had turned at the end of the Long Walk, and now drew near. The lady addressed some remark to Mr. Holroyd, and the *tête-à-tête* was broken. Malcolm fell back, and made irritating demands on Catherine's attention. Had she observed the gorgeous colors of the wet blackberry leaves, crimson, bronze, and orange, in thickets as they passed? Would they not make a beautiful trimming to a dress, frosted with silver? Did she remember a description of such many-dyed foliage by an American poet? Did she like American literature generally?

He was, as Lady Retford fondly said, "so wonderful at making conversation." Catherine wished that he was dumb. She could not hear a word that was interchanged between the two in front, by reason of this garrulous youth.

CHAPTER X.

Two more men arrived at Davenport that evening for the ball; Lord Mountjoy, and Mr. Thane, of the —th. The former was an amusing rattle, short and plain in person, loud in voice, and exuberant in manner, kind-hearted, and recklessly extravagant. The correct thing to say of him was that he was "more his own enemy than any one else's." If his father, Lord Knaresborough, did not soon die, or Mountjoy marry an heiress, he must inevitably collapse.

Charley Thane, as he was always called, was very popular among the set in which he lived, and outside of it had the reputation of giving himself greater airs than any man in London. In one sense this was undeserved. He was not of very exalted birth, nor was he distinguished for any conspicuous personal or mental gifts. But he was a brave soldier; having fought well in the Zulu War, for which he had volunteered, and thus proved himself to be something better than the carpet-knight he had been considered heretofore. He had an imperturbable temper, and believed implicitly in himself; though he never boasted, nor was guilty of any of the indirect arts of self-glorification. It is true he was what his friends called "the coolest hand," and angry old gentlemen of another school, "a d——d impudent puppy." But it succeeded so well—things that would have been permitted to no one else were so freely forgiven in him—that the world came to look upon him as a privileged individual. He never arrived at any country-house unaccompanied by his pet bull-dog, who slept in his room, and frightened all the

housemaids into fits by growling whenever they entered it. He gave particular instructions what sort of a carriage should be sent for him to the station—"a brougham, if you please, I can't stand any sort of open trap"—and proclaimed, without compunction, in his low clear voice, that the champagne was corked, while all the elder men at table were smelling and sipping it in dubious silence. He smoked in his bedroom, and never came down to any meal till it was half over; and yet when he appeared, though the mistress of the house did sometimes meditate angry remonstrance in her heart, there was an easy calm, a delightful impassiveness about him, joined to his pleasant smile and voice, which invariably disarmed her.

The three young men were smoking together in the billiard-room, before dinner. Their conversation, chiefly as to racing, and bets consequent thereon, would have no interest for us. A few words, however, interchanged before they separated to dress, threw some light on the respective views of each.

Thane was speaking.

"What do you mean to do, Roger? Throw the sponge up?"

"I suppose I must marry. There's nothing else left." He said this calmly, without a shade of change on his countenance.

"Find me a little girl with money, that I can like, and I'll do the same to-morrow," cried Mountjoy. "But I'll be hanged if I'll sell myself to some ugly devil. I don't expect to be spooney exactly, I'm not a romantic cove, but I'll be shot if I tie myself for life to some woman I never could get fond of—"

"You'd get fond of any woman—you're of an affectionate disposition," replied Roger, with a slightly contemptuous smile, as he threw away the end of his cigar.

"What is this girl here like? this Miss Johnstone?" asked Thane.

"She isn't *little*. She won't suit Mountjoy. She ain't bad-looking, as heiresses go, but is a difficult fish to hook, requires a deal of play. If my mother wasn't against me, I shouldn't find it hard. As it is, it will be a long, tedious business; and the worst of it is, I can't afford the time."

"How long can you give her to become hopelessly spooney on you, eh?" laughed Mountjoy.

"Well, if I don't do something in the course of the next three or four weeks, I must cut it. There'll be several writs out against me. Shall have to take refuge at Monaco, I suppose, and if the luck's against me there—" he broke off, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. "Deuced unnatural of my mother not to help me in my difficulties, ain't it? Parents don't understand their duties in the present day."

"Why! you ungrateful beggar, Roger," cried Mountjoy, "hasn't your governor pulled you through, over and over again, till he could do so no more?"

"Yes, because he has his own little games, which are expensive. Don't you think at fifty-eight it is time *qu'il se range*? Then my mother—her Puritanical notions of what is wrong, her absurd high-flown ideas about marriage, belong to another age. It's no use arguing with her; if she takes a thing into her head, she sticks to it. She'll put a spoke in my wheel as to marrying this girl, if she *can*."

"It is working against Providence, who clearly brought her here

for your especial benefit," laughed Thane. "But it is time to dress. Show me my room, Roger. I hope it is to the south; I can't bear a north aspect."

"Let me give you one piece of advice," said Roger, as he showed his friend upstairs. "Don't touch the governor's champagne, it is beastly stuff, sweet. He doesn't know good wine when he tastes it. I have had a few dozen sent down for my own private drinking. I'll tell my man to help you too; you're safe with the claret after dinner, it's Lafitte '54, and was laid down in '55, after he married."

At dinner Catherine sat between Mountjoy and Sir Charles Wilverly, who took her in to dinner. She had never looked so well. Lady Davenport had given special pains to Catherine's appearance. The simple white satin dress, the fern-leaves in her dark hair, the necklace of fine pearls, with pear-shaped pendants, suited her to perfection. She was one of those women who gain by wearing little or no color. The rich tones of her skin, the dark brilliancy of her hair, her size and build, were at a disadvantage when accompanied by strong contrasts of tint, and the elaborate details of fluffiness which become diminutive or attenuated women.

She made a feeble attempt to converse with Sir Charles at the beginning of dinner, but Mrs. Hare sat on the other side of him: it was not to be looked for that Catherine should receive more than a limited share of his attention. Before long the two friends were engrossed in each other, as though they had not met for months. Catherine thought, "How very odd, and how delightful to have so much to say to some one you see every day of your life. I wonder if it would be the same if they were married?"

Mountjoy, liberated, after the first ten minutes, from the necessity of talking to Lady Retford, whom he had taken in to dinner, turned round and devoted himself to Catherine. He found her, as he expressed it afterward, "a ripping girl—no humbug—so jolly and natural—none of your stuck-up heiresses." He, who only admired little women, was almost inclined to forgive her size. He was too loyal to think of interfering with Roger; but the idea did certainly cross his mind, toward the end of dinner, that if his friend failed, the future Earl of Knaresborough might succeed, and that he might possibly in time grow fond of this cheery young woman, if he set his mind to it.

As to Catherine, she was amused, and a little astonished. The freedom of manners, the chaff, the slang, in combination with that undefinable something which stamps a man who is used to good society, was a new experience. She had seen nothing like it in Melbourne, nor in her residence in Bayswater: and the young men who had been to Davenport since her arrival had all been colorless, and commonplace. She had believed that the suave refinement, the impassive expression, amounting almost to indifference, of Roger, must characterize all our *jeunesse dorée*. This red-faced little lord, with his twinkling eyes, and hearty enjoyment of a joke, entertained her; she thought she should prefer him greatly to the other new man opposite, who looked so self-satisfied, as he sauntered in, after the fish had been removed, sunk into a chair beside Mrs. Latour, and cast a mild glance, devoid of contrition or of curiosity, round

the table. In consequence of his non-appearance, the lively lady, to whose lot he would naturally have fallen, had been relegated to Roger, who made pantomimic signals to Catherine that he was bored to death. Then Thane sat down, and Mrs. Latour turned and opened her fire upon him instantly. Catherine overheard with amusement the following little dialogue: for Wilverly was already absorbed in Mrs. Hare's conversation, and Mountjoy was still doing some duty-talk with Lady Retford.

"You've missed the soup—and it's turtle!"

"Oh! They won't treat me like a naughty child, and deprive me of it, will they?"

"I don't know. You *deserve* it, because you were to have taken me in."

"Am I not sufficiently punished? Here's the soup—and, confound it!—it's perfectly cold." (Turning to a footman) "Can't you get me some hot soup?"

There was a slight pause. Mrs. Latour looked pensive. "I never *can* understand how there can be so much turtle-soup, when there are so few turtle-doves. Can you?"

The Guardsman's eyes looked up, mildly expostulating.

"Don't. If you put such difficult questions, you will give me an indigestion."

"Isn't Lady Davenport's tiara magnificent? Mr. Davenport calls it, 'the family fender'—isn't that wicked? Do you know what tiara means? Is it named after any king?"

The Guardsman replied gravely, "Of course—a great Irish king. You've heard of 'the harp that once through Tiara's halls.'"

At this moment Mountjoy turned and addressed Catherine: and the rest of the colloquy opposite was lost to her.

For the first time for years, Lady Davenport wore the family jewels. The famous set of sapphires and diamonds which had adorned the heads and throats of successive Lady Davenports for many generations, and which, but for their being strictly entailed, would have been sold long since, saw the light once more. The poor lady sighed as she put them on that night. They were valued at £12,000. The burden of so many troubles—Sir Norman's debts and Roger's—might be lightened, and the estate relieved of some portion of its heavy mortgages, if these useless jewels could be sold! But it might not be. And so Sir Norman had brought them down from the bank a few days before, and at his request, on Lady Davenport's reappearance in the world to-night, they were taken from the safe, in her bedroom, to adorn Mrs. Courtland's ball.

When Catherine went up to her room after dinner, she found a white bouquet of rare exotics on the table. The hot-houses at Davenport had long been done away with.

"Where did these come from?" she asked her maid.

The reply was that the box had just arrived by the last train from London, with instructions outside that it was to be opened immediately. Catherine felt a pleasurable excitement at the receipt of these flowers which it was useless to conceal. She had been schooling herself for the last two days, to turn her thoughts resolutely away from Roger; and now she found herself saying "They must be from him!" But what course ought she to pursue regarding them?

If she taxed him with sending the flowers, and he denied it, she would feel awkward. She went down-stairs, undecided as to what to do.

Lady Retford stood waiting, ready-cloaked, in the hall, with some of the men.

"Gracious! That bouquet must have cost a fortune, Miss Johnstone. You must have sent to London for it?"

"No, I did not, and I have no idea where it came from."

"Haven't you? Then you must be very dense, my dear." Here she screwed up her eyes, and laughed. "I can make a shrewd guess." She leaned forward and whispered, "My scapegrace nephew, who has two 'button-holes' sent him every day throughout the year, won't allow the girl whom he secretly admires more than *any one* to appear at the ball without a bouquet—whatever it may cost."

Catherine would have acted indifference, if she could: she even murmured something about its being "a pity he should have been so extravagant:" but the little smile at the corner of her mouth betrayed her gratification; and it was not lost upon Lady Retford.

An omnibus and two carriages drove the party to Brookwood.

Catherine was not in the same conveyance with Roger, and did not see him till they met in the ball-room: where, for a country gathering, an unusual number of smart London people were assembled.

Mrs. Courtland, "exquisitely un-dressed," as some one described her, and carrying a huge bouquet of yellow roses—received Catherine with great effusion.

"I want to introduce you to the Duchess of Deal, Miss Johnstone, she is dying to make your acquaintance—and her son, Lord Barrencourt—you will find him *so* nice—only a little shy—you must draw him out—now *do* try."

The Duchess of Deal was a lady still young enough to dance, and to commit many follies, among which the losing of very large sums yearly in betting and gambling was the one which most seriously affected His Grace. He was very poor; to maintain his position in life he had indulged in some speculations which had been disastrous; and he had several children. Lord Barrencourt was a young man of unexampled dullness. He was not vicious, nor even unamiable; seen a long way off, he might almost be called good-looking, but he was of unwholesome aspect when near, sleepy, bilious, and ponderously slow. The girl who married him would do so solely to become a future duchess, and she must bring a solid and considerable fortune with her. That girl had not yet been found.

He was brought up to Catherine just at the moment that Roger and the rest of the Davenport party entered the ball-room. Mrs. Courtland turned to receive them. Lord Barrencourt stood impending over Catherine and blinking at her, speechless, while she, entirely indifferent as to whether he spoke or not, watched with keen interest Mrs. Courtland's reception of her guests. She is shaking his hand—she leans a little forward and says something to him in a low voice—he smiles—and whatever his thoughts may be, his smile is always beautiful. Then his eyes rest upon her white shoulders, and travel on to her bouquet of roses. Did he send her that? thinks

Catherine. If so, she hopes that *hers* may have come from any one rather than from him.

She was roused from her speculations by the sleepy young man's asking her to dance. She answered with a start:

"Not the first; the second if you like it."

Roger was coming up to her—she felt certain of it, though her back was now turned toward him. She did not start when she heard his soft voice beside her, asking if he might have this quadrille. She shook her head:

"You come too late. I am engaged for two dances."

"To that great oaf, Barrencourt?"

"No; I divide my benefits—as you do, perhaps?"

This with a quick tentative glance upward, and a wavering smile.

"What do you mean?"

"That you are the most gallant of men, I suspect. You scatter roses with one hand, orchids and lilies with the other—is it not so?"

Oh, most foolish of inexperienced maids, to betray thy jealousy thus! Roger's spirits, beneath that passionless brow, calm smile, and unruffled shirt-front, rose quickly. Success was not as remote as he had feared.

"No, I am not gallant; and as to scattering flowers, I assure you that is not in my line."

"I ought to feel doubly flattered, I suppose, if I am right in believing that it is you I have to thank for this bouquet?"

"I wish you had to thank me for something more lasting; but oblige me by saying nothing about it."

"Why? Do not gentlemen often send bouquets to ladies in England?"

"Not unless they are particularly interested in them."

The girl looked straight into his blue eyes, and then, with a changed manner, said,

"It is good of your to be interested in me; but the interest, I am afraid, would not stand the test of much sacrifice."

"Suppose you try," he said in his sweet, low voice.

She shook her head.

"No, I have no right, on our short acquaintanceship, to do so. If I ever get to know you much better—"

The remainder of her reply was cut short by Mountjoy's coming up to claim her hand. The quadrille was forming.

"Roger, old boy, get a partner, and be our *vis-à-vis*."

He gave her a look, which meant to express, "You drive me to it; it is against my wish. But at least I shall be opposite you," then walked up to Mrs. Courtland.

"I have refused four men. I declared I was not going to dance this, but—" and she took his arm.

"It is as good as a comedy," said Mrs. Hare to Wilverly, as they stood up at the side of the quadrille, "to watch these people, and see their different little games. Miss Johnstone is a dear, clever girl, and I am really fond of her. I have given her a warning, but when was a warning ever of use to any one? If I am not mistaken she will fall a prey to Roger Davenport."

"Of the two, she had better take that fool, Barrencourt. He is harmless, at least—or Mountjoy. They both want to marry money."

"She is ambitious, perhaps, and yet she would not have either of them, I think. She has a strong sense of humor; it keeps people from many follies. Unfortunately there is nothing about Roger Davenport that is ridiculous. That veneer of high-breeding and his extraordinary good looks have an attraction for most women—especially for an Australian girl, who has probably never seen a man of this stamp before."

"Do you think Mrs. Courtland will ever let him out of her clutches? I believe she would make any sacrifice for that fellow. He is the only one she ever really cared for."

"She can't prevent his marrying, you know, because he is quite incapable of any deep strong passion: and, indeed, human beings are such strange complex machines, that I don't feel sure that she would not encourage his marrying 'advantageously,' as it is called. I am told that she said to some one the other day, what a good thing it would be for Roger to marry Miss Johnstone—but, of course, that may only have been said to throw dust in our eyes."

"She reminds me of the old comedy, 'She would and she wouldn't.' She has introduced Barrencourt, you will observe, in hopes that the strawberry-leaves may tempt the girl. Roger, I suppose, is playing one woman against the other. He thinks jealousy may stimulate the heiress to decide in his favor, and carry him off from her rival. He knows your sex," laughed Sir Charles quietly.

Mrs. Hare did not laugh. "You are right as to *him*, I believe. I think he is the worst man I ever knew, not excepting my own husband. But if this girl accepts him, as I am afraid she will, it will not be from such miserable petty motives, but because she loves him. And love is blind, you know."

CHAPTER XI.

HALF an hour later, Philip Holroyd stood with folded arms, leaning against a pillar, at the end of the room. He had kept aloof from the crowd, to which he was a stranger; and yet more than one person had observed with curiosity and interest that thoughtful face, and tall military figure. Who was he? He seemed to know no one: and yet a close observer would have seen that he was not an uninterested watcher of the scene before him. Catherine and Roger were dancing; and Holroyd's eyes never left them, except to look occasionally at Mrs. Courtland, who was waltzing with Thane, and who, while she kept up an animated conversation with her partner, glanced restlessly round the room, and tried after each turn to stop close to where Roger and Catherine stood. This maneuver was defeated each time, in the most natural way, by Roger whirling his partner off, and halting eventually at the further end of the room. He let fall a word, he gave a little smile of reluctant adieu—but he invariably moved away from his fair hostess. Presently the waltz came to an end, and Roger took Catherine into the conservatory. The solitary man left his post too; but not to follow them. He sauntered through the rooms, and came upon Lady Davenport, seated among a group of London ladies, and wearing an aspect of extreme weariness. One of the group was saying, in so shrill a voice that Holroyd heard every word;

"Your heiress, dear Lady Davenport, is a great success—a *very* great success—positively handsome, which no one the least expected! As the duchess said just now, 'She is cheap at the money!' Isn't that like the duchess? She is so droll!"

"Is she? I don't know her," said Lady Davenport coldly. "Mr. Holroyd, will you give me your arm, to get a cup of tea? I suppose it is living so long out of the world," she continued as they moved away, "but all this is indescribably tiresome to me. I wonder how I shall ever do my duty as a chaperon through a London season?"

"Perhaps you may not be called upon."

"What do you mean?"

"That Miss Johnstone has so many admirers, she may possibly choose one—and save you further trouble."

"For her sake, I hope not. A woman with such a fortune is in sad peril. I hope she will not decide rashly. I shall do my best to prevent her."

"I believe you will, Lady Davenport, but you will not succeed." They were standing near the tea-table as he spoke, and handed a cup to her; but something in his tone arrested her attention; she looked up into his face, and the intensity of its expression startled her. How should this girl's choice, for good or evil, stir that deep, unseen well of passion which she had often surmised lay hidden beneath his calm exterior?

"You are a judge of character," she said at last, after drinking her tea in silence. "Tell me, from what you have seen of Miss Johnstone, the impression she makes on you."

He involuntarily started, and colored.

"I—my opportunities of studying her character have been limited. And yet—I will not deceive you, Lady Davenport—why should I? I have a very distinct impression of her character. Her heart is warm, her instincts noble, her nature frank, fearless and generous; but her bringing up among vulgar people has tainted her. Her aspirations are limited to success in fashionable life. She has no judgment—no discrimination, to detect the true from the false. She hungers after admiration, and thirsts for the amusements of the great world, which have hitherto been denied her. And she thinks that happiness is to be found in a marriage out of her own sphere. She will awake to find her bitter mistake, and be a sadder and a wiser woman."

"That does not necessarily follow, if she marries a good man, who really loves her, and not her money," said Lady Davenport slowly. "That is possible: is it not?"

"Of course, it is possible; but you, yourself, admitted that a woman with such a fortune is in great peril. Men of the higher stamp shrink from the imputation of being fortune-hunters; and they will avoid her."

"At all events, those who have no chance of success, do well to do so. I have done, Mr. Holroyd. Let us return to the other room."

The ball was kept up with great spirit, and Catherine, who frankly enjoyed her success, and also frankly enjoyed dancing, for its own sake, was almost perfectly happy during the greater part of the evening. Every one had been kind to her: the duchess had invited

her to Barrencourt; Roger had devoted himself far more to her than to Mrs. Courtland, and had complimented her upon the effect of her first appearance in the world. Once more—in spite of all her wise resolves—a little fluttering hope arose in her heart that he liked her for herself, independently of her money; that she was gradually obtaining an influence over him, and detaching him from a dangerous flirtation. His eyes told her as much—his eyes, and the intonation of his low regretful voice, when he said,

“Now I must leave you. The pleasure of the evening is over for me. You are engaged I know for everything, and I have no right to keep fellows away who are worthier of you in every respect. I shall go and try and distract my thoughts by a game of cards—for I shall dance with no one else to-night.”

This was literally true; though he sat out for half an hour, in a dark corridor with Mrs. Courtland. Then the supper-room was thrown open, and she was carried off by the duke. Roger saw the heiress go in with Barrencourt, and smiled to himself. “The more she sees of that ass, the better for me.” He sauntered on into the card-room, which was at the further end of a long suite.

Two rubbers were going on, and a few men stood round, watching the play. At one whist table four old country squires were violating every rule of Cavendish’s, and laughing over their shilling points in a way to exasperate any serious devotee of the game. At the other, a younger quartet of London men were playing pound points, with five pounds on the rubber; and the interest which gathered round this game was justly due to the science of the antagonists. Roger was one of these four; and when, at the end of a quarter of an hour, two of the players, rose, proposed to the remaining man that they should have a game of écarté.

A small knot of by-standers watched the duel, as they had watched the double encounter of skilled tacticians. Roger Davenport had the reputation of being an exceptionally fine one. It was considered to be instructive to observe his play.

At first he lost: the cards were against him; but the inscrutable calm of his face remained unruffled. Only a close observer could detect that he was a shade paler than usual. There was such an observer in Philip Holroyd, who had entered the room just before Roger’s luck changed. He accidentally took up a position at Roger’s side, and a little behind him. Holroyd had formerly played a great deal: he still occasionally had a game with Sir Norman, or took a hand at whist to make up a rubber. He watched the present game—or rather he watched Roger’s play, and every movement of his hands, with great attention for nearly an hour. At the end of that time, the young man rose, a winner of nearly a hundred pounds. And Philip, with a knit brow, troubled and perplexed, left the room quickly.

He felt very nearly sure that he had detected Roger once in cheating: that he had seen him produce the king from his sleeve. He, moreover, felt almost certain that the trick had been repeated; but though he had not taken his eyes off the young man, he had found it impossible to corroborate this belief. If there was false play, it was effected with such marvelous dexterity as to elude his vigilance. What could he do? Nothing. Had he felt absolutely positive of

this, his course would have been plain in his own eyes. He was not a man to shrink from any duty however painful, or involving whatever consequences. He would have taxed the young man with his crime, and have insisted, on pain of public denunciation, on his making restitution of his ill-gotten gains, by some means or other. But as it was, he knew his former pupil's extraordinary effrontery and coolness, under all circumstances, only too well. He would meet Holroyd's charge by quietly demanding how his brother's tutor dared to insult him so grossly, as to suspect him of foul play? What witnesses had he? Would he even swear that he, Holroyd, had seen this, beyond the possibility of deception? He could not so swear. And then Roger would bring up the two men who had played with him, one after the other, to declare that they never, for a moment, suspected Sir Norman Davenport's eldest son of cheating. No; though the fire kindled within him, Philip Holroyd felt that, for the present, it was impossible he should speak.

He would gladly have walked home, but it was snowing fast, and he had no means of getting away until the carriages were ordered. A cotillon, the great event of the evening, for which Mrs. Courtland had made elaborate preparations, sending to Paris for the presents, and devising all manner of new figures—was in full swing. It was nearly three o'clock, but there seemed no diminution of energy, no immediate chance of the festivities being brought to a close. He stood in a doorway outside the circle, a prey to sad and bitter thoughts, as his eyes followed Catherine wheeling round first with one man and then with another.

Roger Davenport is standing not far from him, also in the outer circle. Catherine, who has looked round the room in vain more than once, suddenly perceives him, and her eye, in sweeping round, has also caught sight of Holroyd's stern face. She has not seen him before all the evening; she has been too fully occupied, too much amused, to remember the man who has met all her advances to friendliness so ungraciously. But now her kind nature prompts her to show him that she bears no malice for his harsh words. She will drag him from his retirement, she will make him dance, as she declared to him she would. A figure has just begun in which the lady selects two men; and, giving them the name of flowers, asks another lady which she prefers, and waltzes herself with the rejected one. Catherine beckons to Roger and he instantly obeys the summons. She does the same to Holroyd, and he shakes his head. She insists—she will take no denial. He is in no humor to dance; his thoughts are otherwise occupied, it is eminently distasteful to him to be dragged out before all these people; but it is not worth discussion; he goes forward and takes the hand she holds out. She asks what flower he chooses to be? He replies, with a grim smile, "A Thistle," whereon Roger declares that he must be the Shamrock, for she is certainly the Rose between them. Mrs. Latour, to whom Catherine goes up, selects the Shamrock, and the Rose and Thistle are left to waltz together. Who could have believed that he danced so well? He is, beyond doubt, the best waltzer in the room. The girl finds herself swept along under his firm grasp and swift guidance in a more masterly and graceful manner than that of any of her other partners, not excluding Roger Davenport. She has not

recovered her astonishment when she is brought up suddenly, without slackening speed or wavering, opposite her chair; he clicks his heels in Austrian fashion together, bows, and retires, before she has found a word to say.

After this, she seeks him, but in vain, each time she has to choose her cavaliers. He has left the ball-room, and she sees him no more until they are stepping into the omnibus on their return home.

Mrs. Courtland pressed Miss Johnstone's hand more affectionately at parting, and leaning forward said,

"You are going to be asked to Barrencourt. 'I am so glad. You ought to be in the best set, you know.'"

"Do you mean that the one I am in is not the best?"

Lowering her voice, the little lady said,

"Well, the men, of course, are excellent; but the Windermers are—well, they are fogies—you understand? and Mrs. Latour and Mrs. Hare would never be asked to Barrencourt."

"Then, as regards Mrs. Hare, the loss is Barrencourt's—that is all I have to say."

"Lord Barrencourt told me he thought you the best-dressed girl in the room, and that was a great deal from him, I assure you."

"I don't doubt it," laughed Catherine, "judging by his conversation. Good-night. I have enjoyed my ball immensely."

"So glad. You have been an immense success. By the bye, where did you get that lovely bouquet? I suppose one of your adorers sent it you."

"I have none."

She blushed as she spoke, for though she believed what she said, she felt the impression her reply conveyed might not be a true one. But the bad taste of the question, under the circumstances, made her angry, and she held that she was justified in not satisfying Mrs. Courtland's curiosity.

Lady Davenport was waiting for her, the carriage had been announced, and hurriedly shaking Mrs. Courtland's hand, she left her.

CHAPTER XII.

WE have regarded Philip Holroyd hitherto chiefly from outside, as he appeared to those who sat at meat with him, and more particularly as he appeared to one person. It is necessary, now, in order rightly to comprehend his conduct and its results, that we should examine the inner man unseen, unsuspected by most. All knew, indeed, that here was an iron will. Neither Sir Norman's offer of double pay nor Lady Davenport's entreaties had prevailed, six years before, to alter his determination after he had resolved to throw up the tutorship of their eldest son. When he undertook the charge of Malcolm, a few months since, it was only upon condition that his law should be absolute and beyond appeal. What none, except, possibly, Lady Davenport, surmised, was that under that cold exterior were violent passions, solely restrained by the exercise of this will. That it had not always been thus, was known to those who were acquainted with the history of his early life. He had loved, he had fought, and he had, as it is called, "ruined his

prospects in life." In quitting the army and adopting a new career, he had sworn to keep under subjection "the old man;" but this conquest had only been gained by extraordinary vigilance and self-control.

Before Catherine Johnstone arrived at Davenport, the circumstances under which she was to become an inmate there were made known to Holroyd, chiefly through Malcolm's garrulity. They created an unfavorable impression upon a mind, one of the main failings of which was its readiness to conceive strong prejudice. This colonial young woman, discontented with her natural sphere, and seeking admission into higher ones by virtue of her wealth, was eminently repellent to him. She must be vulgar-minded, purse-proud, and ill-educated. She came; and he declared to himself that his prejudice was confirmed. She was all that he liked least in woman; large, and dark, and bold—for so he called her frankness, and freedom from self-consciousness. Had she been small, and shy, he would have forgiven her, with a contemptuous shrug, probably; and she would not have occupied his thoughts for five minutes in any given day thereafter. As it was, in spite of avoidance and studied coldness on his part, in spite of his disapproval of some things that she said and did, in the teeth of all his prejudices, she interested him daily more and more. When she was present, though he might be at the further end of the room, or apparently absorbed in his book, no word, no movement of hers escaped him. He asked himself, why was it? He tried to argue himself out of this irrational fascination; but here the limits of his powerful will were reached. He could say, "I will keep aloof. She shall never think that I am one of the wretched pack of hunters who will very soon be pursuing her. She shall never guess the power she might have over me." And he could act in accordance with this resolve. What he could not do was to prevent Catherine Johnstone being the subject that more and more engrossed his thoughts, to the exclusion of every other interest.

No one as keen-sighted and as interested in observing Catherine as Holroyd was, could fail to detect that Roger's superficial charm had dazzled her, to some extent. The young man's tactics puzzled him. He entertained the worst opinion of his former pupil, whose conduct, he felt sure, would be utterly unscrupulous in this matter.

But, as far as Holroyd could see, Roger for some time made no effort to ingratiate himself with the heiress; recklessly parading, on the contrary, his allegiance to Mrs. Courtland. What was his game? The girl was captivated by his manly beauty, his air of high-breeding, his charming voice, his perfect self-possession. Was it to throw her off her guard that he paid her so little attention? that he allowed his personal charm to work its effect silently, unobtrusively? Holroyd had not a doubt that Roger had the girl's money in view. He was not likely to capture an English heiress, or to have such another chance as this. Holroyd did full justice to the young man's evil ability. He perceived that the net was being adroitly cast round the girl; far more adroitly than by a desperate onslaught.

The irritation which he had long felt, had for some days past been merged in a nobler and more passionate commiseration. It was no use pretending to believe that the girl deserved her fate; that if she was deceived in Roger, she had herself courted such deception. He

acknowledged to himself now that he had misunderstood her character. Her bright intelligence, her quick perceptions, on the one hand, were counterbalanced, as it were, on the other, by her ignorance of the world, and her extraordinary transparency and frankness. He had little believed it possible he could ever again be as interested in any woman, as he was in this girl; and the interest grew: it was not mere curiosity; he found it absorbing him more and more. It could not signify to him—he repeated to himself—what her choice was in life. It ought to be, it must be, a matter of indifference whom she married. Only he made this reservation. In heaven's name, let it not be Roger.

Two questions of a very different nature, but which he found equally difficult to answer, produced a state of ferment in his mind, to which it had long been a stranger. He was used to arrive at his decisions rapidly, to suffer no perplexity, to admit of no consideration. It was not so now; how could he prevent Catherine's falling a prey to one every way unworthy of her, taking the most lenient view of him, without being disloyal to the family of which Holroyd was a member? How could he, who had an unaffected regard for Lady Davenport, take advantage of his position of trust, to betray what he had learned of her son's character, and thus destroy that son's hope of making a rich marriage? A rich marriage! How horrible the expression sounded in his ears! And yet it was only thus that Roger regarded the entrapping of an honest-hearted, innocent girl. Holroyd knew this, but his tongue was tied; and though she should come to him for advice, as she had suggested doing two days since, must he not remain silent, as much from a sense of honor as from the consciousness that his antagonism to Roger might now be tinged by jealousy? He could come to no conclusion that satisfied him.

The other question which recurred constantly to his mind the morning after the ball was, how he should act with regard to Roger? The moment was passed for taxing him with the commission of an act, which, if proved, would effectually shut the doors of society upon him. Holroyd had almost a moral certainty that the young man had cheated; it might be a sudden temptation, it might be his first offense, and if warned, he might retreat from that downward path. Was it not Holroyd's duty—or at least, would it not be the act of a generous foe, to give him this chance of redemption? But how should he do this? If he spoke to him openly, he would be met by haughty and indignant denial; in which case he would have no choice but to leave Davenport; for to remain here, after charging the son of the house with such a crime, would be impossible.

A course suggested itself to him which he at first scorned; but the expediency of which became gradually more apparent. After a few minutes' reflection he seized a pen, and wrote the following words on a slip of paper in a large, bold text-hand.

"Be warned. You were watched last night. Was it the first time?"

Holroyd argued thus. If Roger was innocent he would not even know to what this referred, and he would probably come direct to

Holroyd to demand an explanation; for there was no attempt to disguise his writing. At all events, he would demand the meaning of this anonymous communication. His silence, on the other hand, would be proof positive of Roger's guilt in Holroyd's eyes. Alarmed and startled at discovery, as he could not fail to be, it was just possible that he might yet amend his ways.

It was a bright winter's morning. The snow lay thick on the ground. Though the clock had struck eight, the house—at least that wing in which were the bachelors' rooms—was still apparently buried in profound slumber. Holroyd had long been awake; indeed, he had slept but little since his return from the ball; and had been dressed some time when he left his room, and entered the passage occupied by Roger and Malcolm. As he reached the top of the stairs, he heard the furtive stir of housemaids below; the click of window-bars removed, and shutters opened; the sweep of brooms, and clang of scuttles and fire-irons. But these sacred precincts of bachelorhood were safe from intrusion for awhile. Here, above, the *jeunesse dorée* was enjoying well-merited repose: and no valet would be so ill-advised as to disturb the sleepers for another couple of hours at least. The last rooms in the passage were those of the two brothers. Holroyd opened Roger's door without hesitation, and entered.

The pale silvery light which streamed into the luxurious chamber through the half-drawn curtains fell upon the dressing-table and glittered on studs and scarf-pins, on gilt bottles, and silver-handled brushes, and upon a pile of sovereigns and bank-notes. A velvet smoking-suit lay on one chair, a Turkish dressing-gown upon another. A withered gardenia, still emitting a faint perfume, was on the floor, beside a glove, and a pair of worked slippers. Further on, a writing-table was littered with bills, letters, betting-memoranda. Holroyd's eye noted each object, not omitting a yellow-covered French novel, from beneath which peeped the muzzle of a silver-chased pocket-pistol.

"Who knows but that may be the end of it?" he said to himself. Then he laid the sealed envelope on the dressing-table, where Roger could not fail to observe it, and walked toward the bed.

There he lay sleeping as calmly as a little child, his golden head buried in the pillow, the pale handsome face turned upward to the light, the curved lips parted, as if about to smile. It was hard to think that this perfect ivory mask concealed so much that was evil; so little capable of growing into good.

The man who stood motionless beside the bed with folded arms, said again to himself as he glanced back at the pistol,

"I believe if any one would blow out your brains now, it would be the kindest deed to you, wretched boy. It would save you a load of future sin, and others a load of misery. If Euthanasia can be justified, the putting an end to the sufferings of one past physical recovery—why not to one whose moral condition is hopelessly diseased?"

For an instant a cynical smile at his own plausibility hovered on his lips, and then he sighed. He was not a soft-hearted man, but for this boy's mother's sake, for the sake of an admirable woman whom Holroyd venerated, he was doing his best to save the young

reprobate. It was not much, and he knew the human heart too well to have any faith in a reformation wrought by a momentary scare. It would, possibly, prevent him from ever repeating the same crime; it would certainly not prevent his committing others.

An hour later he received a little pencil note from Lady Davenport.

"Will you breakfast with us at ten, instead of in the school-room? Malcolm is still asleep, and I hope you will excuse him this morning."

Philip Holroyd hated to acknowledge that he was glad of any pretext now to be in Catherine's company, even if they should not exchange a word. He entered the room at ten, and found only Lady Davenport. The party slowly dribbled in, but at nearly eleven o'clock Thane and the two brothers had not yet appeared. Catherine sat at the extreme end of the table, near, but not absolutely next, to Sir Norman. Holroyd was upon one side of her, the other seat was vacant, and she hoped Roger would occupy it. She kept looking toward the door, but he did not appear. After the interchange of some commonplace remarks about the ball, she said to her neighbor:

"It was very good-natured of you to waltz with me, Mr. Holroyd, for you hated doing it, I know—though you danced better than any one. I was quite surprised."

He looked amused. "It does seem incongruous—but I was once a good waltzer, and liked it. Now—" he broke off, as though he thought it wiser to pursue that subject no further. "Coming altogether in a new society, as you are doing, may I ask what strikes you most?"

"Well, to begin with, that every one seems more at ease than at the parties I have gone to, and better dressed—certainly, better dressed—though I can't say I admire Mrs. Courtland's. We should not think that good taste at Melbourne. Let me see, what next? Oh! I observe they don't hitch up their dresses when they waltz, as I was taught to do. Lord Mountjoy told me not to do it, which I thought was very kind of him."

"There is certainly no lack of ease there," observed Holroyd.

She glanced up at him with a twinkling eye.

"I don't like people to be so very stiff and reserved. I suppose, as he is a lord, his manners are all right. He is the first young one I have ever known, for Lord Windermere does not count."

"He would not like to hear that," said Holroyd, with a smile.

"There is as much difference, however, between the manners of lords, as of linen-draperies. There ought to be no essential difference between the manners of gentlemen."

"I am glad there is," returned Catherine, with spirit. "I don't care about the world being all alike, and perhaps some people's model for manners I shouldn't admire."

He did not at all mind the rebuff, which he felt was merited. Just then Mrs. Latour glided into the room in a dove-colored cashmere dress embroidered in silver, and her head a mass of elaborate curls. She dropped into the chair next to Sir Norman at the head of the table, which Catherine had expected Roger to fill.

"Sapristi! My dear Clare!" exclaimed the baronet, looking up

from his plate at his silly cousin. "What an attire! One would think you were going to a *déjeuner* in May!"

"Oh! Norman, I had not time to think what I would put on. I said to my maid, 'Dress me for fifteen,' and she dressed me for thirty. It's *her* fault."

Lord Mountjoy, a little way down the table, laughed out loud.

"Well, I hope you enjoyed your ball?" said Sir Norman. "I never saw any one dance as you did. I don't think you missed once."

"Oh! Norman, when a woman is as much made up to as I am, it is so difficult to refuse. Wasn't it delightful, Miss Johnstone? I hope, Norman, the C—— ball will be as good—will it?"

"Well, a county ball, you know, is never the same thing—a mixture. You can't exclude the *mezzo ceto*."

"What's that?" asked Catherine.

Mrs. Latour, who was always thirsting to impart her information, replied, "It means the *demi-monde*. Of course in one's own house in London, one keeps the two sets separate. I always have one party for the *grand-monde* and another for the *demi-monde*."

Mountjoy shouted again with merriment.

"Mind you ask me to the *demi-monde* party, Mrs. Latour. I'm a young man from the country, and know nothing of it. It must be much greater fun than the swells, ain't it?"

Mrs. Latour did not feel sure what she ought to reply, so she limited herself to, "Well—I admit—sometimes—but *noblesse oblige*, you know."

Her host made a vain effort to stop his fair cousin's mouth.

"What are you going to eat, Clare? Have some of this *pâté de foie gras*, it is excellent."

"How can you ask me, Norman? It's so cruel."

"What do you mean, eh? Cruel to ask you to eat?"

"No, no—the *pâté*. Don't you know how it is made?"

"Indeed I don't—I suppose it is like a game or any other *pâté*, eh?"

"Oh, no, no!" said his cousin, shaking her elaborately curled head. "The poor creature—is it a duck or a goose, by the by? I forget. It isn't game, I know."

"A goose is oftenest made game of," softly murmured Mrs. Hare, looking down upon her plate, as was her manner when she fired a shot for the benefit of the table.

"It isn't game at all—hares and rabbits are game," returned Mrs. Latour, with toleration for ignorance. "Well! whatever it is, the wretched bird is put upon a red-hot plate and kept dancing there until it is cooked, and comes out as—as *pâté de foie gras*."

"Lord Bacon says, 'There is no fool like a she-fool,'" whispered Mrs. Hare. The object of this pointed remark did not hear what was said, but she was dimly conscious that the speaker treated her rather contemptuously. She revenged herself by saying to Catherine: "You know Mrs. Hare has written a dreadfully improper book—of erratic verses, all about herself?"

"No, I don't. You've read them, I suppose?"

"Oh! I wouldn't on any account! A woman like me can't be too particular what she says and does. The world is so ill-natured.

"I find it so good-natured, on the contrary."

"Ah! but you are different, you see. Perhaps you don't find it necessary to lock your door at night? I do. I find it so necessary to be careful, in all I say and do!"

"So I perceive," replied Catherine, demurely.

At this moment Malcolm entered the room, and went up to his mother. He kissed her, and then whispered something, which made her look troubled. Her lips contracted, as they had a habit of doing, when she had any cause for anxiety. She asked him one or two questions; the replies apparently were unsatisfactory. After a few minutes' hesitation she made a sign to Holroyd; who rose and went to her.

"I hear there are two men outside, who are asking to see Roger. Will you kindly go and see what it is they want—and let me know? Say nothing to Sir Norman."

Holroyd left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS JOHNSTONE had a habit of going every morning after breakfast to look at her horses.

When the party left the dining-room a quarter of an hour later she put on her hat in the hall, and let herself out into the stable-yard by a passage communicating with it. As she opened the door she observed Holroyd, under the archway close by in conversation with two men. One of these was unmistakably a Jew; the other a dapper little Gentile.

She had to pass near them, and could not avoid hearing what the Jew said, in a harsh, thick voice.

"It ain't no good, sir. He's in the house here, that I know, and if he ain't going to pay me down on the nail, I've got a judgment in the county court to seize—"

She lost the rest, and as Holroyd's back was toward her she could not catch his reply; but her curiosity and interest were awakened. What did it mean? Catherine had but a vague idea of what "a judgment in the county court" implied. Who was the object of it. Sir Norman, or his son?

One of the horses was not well: she remained some time in the stable, and when she left it, the strangers were walking up and down the yard. Holroyd was gone. The Jew looked at her, and then apparently asked some question of a groom who crossed the yard at the moment. No properly brought-up young lady would have acted as Catherine did. She never could explain afterward why she felt impelled to stop and address this man, for whatever his business here might be, it certainly could be no concern of hers. "Are you waiting for any one?" she said.

"Yes, miss, and we don't mean to go away till we have seen him."

She hesitated. "Is it Sir Norman Davenport?"

"No, it's his eldest son—Mr. Davenport. If, as I understand, you are the young lady as he's goin' to marry—"

"You have been misinformed"—interrupted the girl with a flaming cheek.

"Oh—then his game's up, and his personalty 'll be seized," said the man with impudent familiarity.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I ain't a-goin' to let him slip off abroad, without getting some of the thirteen hundred as he owes me—that's all."

"Slip off abroad! Mr. Davenport is too much a man of honor to—"

"Honor? Bless you! there's nothin' dishonorable in tryin' to do a man as has a legal claim on him—that's where it is. I've his promissory note, and he didn't defend the action as I brought, and I'm what they calls an 'execution creditor,' you see, now. I've the right to seize all his goods—and I mean to do it. They ain't worth more than half what he owes me, but—"

"What is the amount of his debt to you?"

"Somethin' under thirteen hundred pounds."

"What is that for? What are you?"

"I'm a gen'leman as advances money—to oblige, miss."

"How long has this been owing?"

"The money was lent for six months, and the note is overdue now more than three weeks. The gent as backed the bill I find's gone to America. Mr. Davenport sha'n't do the same, I'm resolved—till I've got something out of him."

"But you are surely not going to seize all his things here—now—in his father's house? It's impossible!"

"You'll see whether it's impossible, presently, miss. Unless I get a check for my bill, with our traveling expenses, me and the officer here, I take all his jewelry, and his dressing-case, which my partner, Mr. Israels, sold him for two hundred pounds eighteen months ago."

"Those things were paid for?"

"Yes—but there are plenty of other bills not paid for. Only, I'm first in the field, you see. That's where it is."

Catherine turned upon her heel, and left the yard. She walked straight to her own sitting-room, and sat down. Could she act in this matter; and if so, how? She had a large balance at her banker's; it seemed obvious that she should, if possible, prevent this disgrace from falling upon the family with whom she had elected to live. Her interest in the man himself, her intense desire to relieve him from his difficulties, she would not admit to herself, as main incentives to action. Indeed, she went the length of believing that it would be easier to help him if she had no personal feeling in the question. But now, how was this to be done without wounding his susceptibility, and exposing herself to misconstruction?

Suddenly, an idea struck her, and with her habitual rapidity of decision, she rang the bell, and desired her footman to go to Mr. Holroyd, and beg that gentleman to come and speak to her immediately.

"If he is not in the study you must hunt for him everywhere till you find him, and say, it is important I should see him, for five minutes, immediately."

As soon as the servant had left the room she took out her check-book and filled in a check for thirteen hundred pounds; then she sat and waited.

It was fully a quarter of an hour before she heard the firm, long stride which she at once recognized, coming down the passage. Before Holroyd had reached the door she stood there, and had opened it.

"Will you come in?" she began rapidly—"I want to speak to you about that horrid Jew who is down in the court-yard. I know what he is come here for. I want, if I can, to prevent this disgrace from falling upon Lady Davenport, and—and all of them. But of course I don't want to appear myself. I can't do anything—it would be impossible—you understand?"

He looked at her, half compassionately, half sternly.

"No; I do not."

She replied quickly, "This Jew means to seize all Mr. Davenport's things. Think of the scandal! It must be prevented—it must."

"How do you propose to do this?"

"I will pay the money—but no one must know it is I—Mr. Davenport least of all. I want you to devise some means by which this can be done. Do help me, Mr. Holroyd; you are the only person who can do so."

"Are you at all aware what is the amount of this debt?" he asked, after a slight pause.

For all reply, she took the check from the table, and placed it in his hand. He examined it with knit brow; then, holding it out, and pointing with the other hand to the vacant space, he said,

"You have not filled in Mr. Barton's name; but you must do so. And, in that case, how am I to prevent the fact of your having paid this debt from being known? The Jew will assuredly speak of it. He knows you are a young lady of considerable fortune, and—"

"And he came here partly on that account. I am aware of that. You need not be afraid, the gossip does not hurt me; but I should be sorry if Mr. Davenport heard it—or his mother. That is why I am doubly anxious my little plot should never be known. I did not know this Barton's name, so I could not have written it; but at all events, I should not give my check to him."

"To whom, then, do you propose that it should be paid?"

"To you."

"To me?" he repeated, with cold astonishment. "But this is not so easy a matter as you seem to imagine. In the first place, I have no wish to mix myself up in Roger Davenport's affairs. I spoke to this Jew just now at Lady Davenport's particular request, and ascertained that he had legal power to seize Roger's personalty, and that he meant to exercise this right. When Roger sees Barton he must settle his own affairs as best he can. I strongly advise your having nothing to do with them."

"Thank you," she replied, with the only approach to a smile her face had yet worn; "but you virtually declined to give me any advice when I asked for it yesterday, and now I am going to act upon my own judgment—or, perhaps, I ought to say, from deliberate choice."

"That would probably be nearer the mark."

She flushed. "I hope you do not misunderstand me? I do this

mainly out of my regard and sympathy for Lady Davenport—and my desire to spare her humiliation and pain.”

“The respite will be but temporary. In Roger’s own interests, it is better that he should be made to suffer. It is the only chance left of his reform.”

“You speak severely. Did you never commit any follies when you were his age?”

The words were no sooner out of her mouth, than she regretted them. His brow contracted, and he began hastily,

“I did many wrong things, Miss Johnstone, but I never—no matter. You did not send for me to discuss Roger Davenport’s character; my opinion can be of no importance to you. You have made up your mind how you mean to act in this and every other circumstance regarding him, no doubt.”

“In this I have; and I feel confident that you will prevent my being placed in a false position. You can do it so easily. Go to the Jew; tell him that if he will accompany you quietly back to London by the next train, he shall have his money paid in full, instead of the few hundreds he would be able to raise by selling Mr. Davenport’s jewelry. He will believe you—I could see he was half in hopes that something of this sort would result from his visit. May I fill in your name?”

What a strange compound of cleverness and ignorance, of business-like method and recklessness, of daring and modesty, this singular girl was! Holroyd looked at her in surprise: he felt that it would be some time yet before he could really understand her character. He said nothing, but walked to the window, and looked out. Not that he was hesitating to obey her command. Though his manner might be stiff and ungracious, and though he might maintain that it was better for Roger that he should bear this disgrace, she had judged rightly, that he would not turn a deaf ear to her appeal. But he foresaw that there would be more difficulty in keeping her name out of the affair than she, sanguine and inexperienced, could anticipate.

“Let me be frank with you. You will be placed in ‘a false position.’ It will be impossible to prevent the truth being suspected: and it is an unheard-of thing for a girl to pay a young man’s debts—a man, too, who is a comparative stranger—to the tune of £1300. Still, if you insist on doing this, and running the risk of—of what may be said, I will not refuse to carry out your wishes, though it is, for many reasons, most distasteful to me. But I wish I could dissuade you from taking a step which, I feel sure, is not a wise one. To begin with, what fiction can I devise to Roger to account for his relief from Barton’s importunity?”

“Make him give you a bond, payable to yourself. Of course it won’t be worth the paper it is written on, and you can tear it up: but you can say that a friend of yours will advance you the money upon it: and I dare say Mr. Davenport knows too little of business to see the improbability of such a thing.”

“He is not quite so simple, I am sorry to say, as you imagine. My objection to this course is that it places him under a heavy imaginary obligation to me. I assume the part of a benefactor, and must receive his thanks—and, what is far worse, the thanks of his

mother. You are asking me to do what is altogether contrary to my nature, Miss Johnstone."

"Never mind," returned the girl calmly. "Motives are everything. You will have earned hearty thanks from all. Your claim to gratitude in doing what you dislike is greater than mine, who am doing what pleases me. I dare say it is unwise, from every point of view: it is just a selfish gratification. I have the money lying idle, and I prefer to spend it in this way to any other."

"It would be better to fling it into the sea," he muttered.

She took up a pen and wrote Philip Holroyd's name on the check, without making any rejoinder.

He looked at his watch; the London train was due in half an hour. If this thing had to be done—

"There is no time to lose. I must go and find the Jew," he said.

She handed him the check, and then, for the first time in her life, their hands met.

"Will you not shake hands with me?" she asked, smiling, and keeping hers extended. He had withdrawn his; but now an iron grasp closed round her fingers.

"Let us be friends henceforward, Mr. Holroyd."

He gave her a strange, almost a sad look as it seemed to her; and then he left the room without a word.

"That is a very odd man," said Catherine to herself. "He repels me, and yet if I did not resist it with all the force of my will, he would possess a strong influence over me. I was determined not to listen to him, but to make him do what *I* wanted, and I have so far succeeded. Now I am happy. I could not have gone on living here, with the misery hanging over these people. As to Roger Davenport—well, I will wait. Though I have warnings on every side, I can't believe him to be more than foolish. How hard the world is, Mr. Holroyd, every one—in its judgments!"

CHAPTER XIV.

ROGER, half-dressed, sat near his toilet table with a paper in his hand. The envelope which contained it had fallen on the floor. His brow was knit; it would have been difficult to read the complex expression on his face. He had been sitting so for more than ten minutes, when he heard a knock at his door. Crumpling up the paper in his hand, he said, "Come in," and Lady Davenport entered.

She looked very grave as she kissed him.

"Do you know what has happened while you have been asleep?" He shook his head, and she continued. "That man Barton has been here. Did you know that he had obtained legal right to seize your personal property?"

"I knew it was imminent—but I suppose the brute can be pacified, if I get the bill renewed."

"He will not be pacified unless he receives, in the course of the next twenty-four hours, the full amount you owe him—"

"The beast! he charges fifty per cent. I'll kick him down to the lodge gates, if I catch him here. Have you seen him?"

"No, and I am glad to say you will not be able to behave foolishly about him, for he is gone. Mr. Holroyd saw him; what passed between them I can not say, but they are gone to London together, Mr. Holroyd saying that he could get the money advanced by a friend."

"Mr. Holroyd gone up to town, to raise this money for me? Impossible!" and he unconsciously grasped yet tighter the paper in his hand.

"Why impossible? He is a stern man, and he would not put up with your pranks, but he is a true friend, Roger."

"He hates me—he always did hate me. I suppose he thinks to get a hold over me by this interference."

"How can you be so silly, and so ungrateful! I heartily wish he could obtain a hold over you, my poor boy. But how he is to procure the money I have not an idea: it seems impossible that any one would advance such a sum without adequate security—and you have none to give."

"It doesn't much signify," said the young man, with a return to his usual indifference of tone, from which he had been momentarily roused. "It is only a drop in the ocean after all. My debts of honor amount to three times as much as this dirty Jew's bill."

"Oh! Roger! Roger! and you make no effort to redeem yourself from this disgraceful position! You have no shame!"

She spoke with vehemence, and her pale cheek flushed. Her son rose from his chair and sighed, before he answered in a low voice, as he bent his blue eyes down upon her,

"I have made an effort, but you have opposed it. I believe I could manage to keep straight if I were once set on my legs, and married to a good sort of girl—with money."

"And you have so little pride that you could ask this girl to take the burden of your debts upon her?"

"I should not ask her to take it, but I should not deceive her. You would not wish me to deceive her? If I tell her everything, and she likes me well enough to pay four or five thousand pounds for me before we marry, what harm is there? Isn't it better than running over head and ears in debt after marriage, and ruining the estate as my father has done?"

"We will not discuss your father. That has nothing to do with you."

"Unfortunately it has—everything. He has mortgaged the property so heavily that I shall never get a farthing out of it. If I don't marry there is nothing left for me, that I can see, but to go abroad. I suppose it will end in my becoming a billiard-marker or croupier at a hell."

He meant to distress her, though he really cared for his mother as much as it was in his nature to care for anything except himself. But if she was to be moved to help his schemes, in this or any other way, her feelings must be probed to the quick. The ashy color of her face, however, and the spasm of pain that contracted it, caused him some remorse. He stooped, and kissed her on the brow.

"Never mind, mother; you have a model son in Malcolm, who will inherit all Lady Retford's money, and redeem the family estates when I am gone to the dogs."

"What do I care about the family estates compared with your good name? Oh! my poor boy, there is no sacrifice I would not make to redeem you from your present course of life. To watch you going headlong to destruction is a daily agony to me—no one knows what I suffer—but I will not, I dare not, connive at this marriage. It would be a crime, knowing you as I do. You have no control over your passions, over even your inclinations. Miss Johnstone would be intolerant of your weakness—she would be a miserable woman. You would not be unkind, I think, but you would neglect her—squander her money—and it would probably end in separation. How much better would it be for you to accept the appointment that was offered you in India, and lay by a sum out of your salary every year to discharge your debts by degrees!"

He smiled sarcastically.

"You speak like a book, mother; but I know myself too well. I'm not made for office work, to begin with, and I couldn't lay by money, if my life depended on it. Besides, debts of honor must be paid at once, or what you dread most—dishonor—must follow. Does no means occur to you?"—he added with a little hesitation—"of raising the wind for me?"

She shook her head.

"Everything of my own of value I sold to pay your debts last year."

He was silent for a moment: he looked away from her; then he said rapidly,

"What is the use of keeping those family jewels?"

"Of course, if they had not been entailed, they would have been sold long ago."

"But if I or Malcolm were to succeed to-morrow we should sell them. Why shouldn't they be sold as well now, as a few years hence?"

"You can never sell them, until you have a son who can cut off the entail."

He turned toward the window, as he said carelessly, "Who can tell whether they are in the bank or not?"

"What do you mean?" she asked with cold severity.

"Why, simply, that it is locking up so many hundreds a year. You have not worn them for ages till the other night, and perhaps will not wear them for ages again."

"They have been locked up in the bank for years, it is true; but your father brought them down here the other day, and it is his wish that I should wear them now that I am obliged to go into society again. But that has nothing to say to it—under no circumstances would it be possible to part with them, for the jewels belong neither to your father nor to you nor to Malcolm. There are your cousins in the entail, and it would be nothing less than fraud to sell property which might one day be theirs—with the object of paying your debts."

He took a turn up and down the room in silence.

"I see you can not help me. Well, I suppose I must make myself scarce, unless I can do something in the next few weeks. When is the C—— ball?"

"Tuesday in next week. Shall you stay for it?"

She did not say will you: nor did the tone in which she made the inquiry indicate any strong wish that he should remain. Indeed, fond as the poor mother was of her scapegrace son, she felt that if he was to go abroad, perhaps it was better that he should go at once; and thus flee from the dangerous fascination of Mrs. Courtland, and the temptation to impose upon Catherine's credulity.

"I shall be at the ball—though perhaps I may go up to London for a day or two before that."

Soon after this Lady Davenport left her son's room. He did not come down-stairs till luncheon time. The interval was passed by him in reflection; in the formation and rejection of sundry plans of action, and in a final resolve the effects of which will in due time be seen.

Philip Holroyd returned late, and did not appear in the drawing-room. Some dinner was taken to him in the library, and there, half an hour after, Roger joined him. He knew he could not avoid this interview, and he sought it with the courage which, to do him justice, never deserted him. There were men, like Holroyd, who called this unflinching nerve "audacity," or by the yet harsher name of "bare-faced impudence;" but certain virtues resemble colors, the value of which is affected by others they are associated with. Roger's one virtue was discredited by its companion qualities. The prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with a man whom he hated, and whom he had reason to believe had him in his power, was anything but pleasant; yet he walked into the room with a firm step, and met Holroyd's upward glance and short smileless nod, with an undaunted gaze. He stood on the hearth-rug, having his back to the fire, while Philip quietly finished peeling his pear at the table, without looking again at him.

"I hear you have been about my affairs to London. It is awfully good of you, I'm sure. Of course you were not able to do anything?"

"Yes. I have done something." He pulled Barton's receipt from his breast coat-pocket, and threw it across the table. "But you have nothing to thank me for. The money is not mine, and what I did, I did for your mother's sake—"

"I am well aware it was not for mine," interrupted Roger in the softest voice.

"No," continued the other sternly. "I should certainly not have given you the money, if I had had it. I believe it would be far better for you to be made to suffer now, and be driven to accept some post abroad; you might then possibly turn over a new leaf. As it is, if you continue this life, you will be led from folly into crime"—here he looked up and their eyes for an instant met—"and your mother's gray hairs will be brought in sorrow to the grave, Roger Davenport."

He winced, and Holroyd saw the color rise in the young man's face, but he answered with composure.

"You always took the worst view of me, Mr. Holroyd, you always disliked me so much that I can't understand why you have taken all this trouble about my affairs? You say you would not have given the money yourself, and yet you have procured it. From whom? and on what security?"

"From a friend, on the security of your word to repay the money to me when you are able to do so. Read this paper and then sign it," and he pushed something in the form of a note across the table.

Roger ran his eye over it, and then a peculiar smile crossed his face.

"Your friend is certainly not a man of business. Of what value can such a promissory note as this be? Of course I will sign it, but I should like to know first who it is who is generous enough to advance this money for me?"

"It surprises me to find you are so particular as to the source from which any money reaches you," returned Philip sarcastically. "You must be satisfied, however, in this case, to know that I paid the money into Mr. Barton's hand, and that to me thirteen hundred pounds are to be refunded, if you ever are in a position to do so. The value of the note I ask you to sign is simply as evidence of a loan, the repayment of which I have certainly no legal power to enforce."

Roger took up a pen and wrote his name rapidly on the document before him. The suspicion, which had flashed through his brain a few minutes before, was confirmed. How she, who never appeared to hold much communication with the tutor, had come to intrust him with so delicate a commission, puzzled the young man; but that the money came from Catherine he felt almost certain, and this belief raised his hopes.

"I may be able to repay your generous friend before very long," he said, "and if not, I promise you that the country will be rid of my presence."

Philip looked up. "What do you think of doing?" he asked abruptly.

Roger raised his eyebrows, and then turned his face toward the fire.

"Go where I am unknown, and live—somehow."

"If instead of 'live' you said 'work,' I should be satisfied."

"I dare say you will be satisfied," returned the young man with all his accustomed indifference of manner. "Your worst prognostications of me will be fulfilled. I have prepared my mother to find that I am become a 'croupier' or billiard-marker."

"Then you have done a cowardly and cruel thing," Philip stood up as he spoke. "You have added an extra drop of gall to your mother's cup of bitterness. I had long known that you had no principle—I had lately suspected that you had lost all sense of honor; but I believed you had still some feeling for her—that you would not willingly add to her grief on your account. My last hope for you is gone. I see that no appeal to you on that score would be of any avail, for you are utterly heartless. God preserve any woman from falling into your hands! I should pity even the most worthless, if she unfortunately loved you."

Never before in all these years had Roger seen that man of iron mastered by passion. His voice shook, his face went deadly white; the long-pent indignation had found a momentary vent. He could trust himself no longer, and left the room before Roger had framed a reply.

But that astute young gentleman remained cogitating for a considerable time upon a fact which puzzled him. His former tutor had

rarely, if ever, manifested the smallest interest in his concerns; had never expressed either anger or solicitude as to his evil-doings. Within the last twenty-four hours Roger had received no less than two evidences of a watchfulness and exasperation on the part of Holroyd, the key to which he could not at once find. His last words, coupled with the fact of Catherine's intrusting a secret commission to him, gave Roger the first hint as to the strong personal interest Philip took in the woman whom Roger now felt tolerably confident should be his wife. Unless she meant to marry him, it was inconceivable that she should present him with thirteen hundred pounds; and that this money came from her was certain. His mother could not, and Lady Rettford—he knew by experience—would not, have advanced it. It was like what he knew of the girl's character, that she should secretly do this: but only on the supposition that she was in love. Holroyd could not have failed to discover this; and the discovery had intensified his animosity to Roger. It was not her money that he sought; Roger, strange to say, did the tutor full justice; he had unaccountably fallen in love with the girl: that was the only explanation of it. And now, what would Philip Holroyd's course be? As Roger asked himself this, he could not deny that he was to a certain extent in the power of a man whose mind was influenced against him by jealousy. Yet that man had been up to London, at Catherine's bidding, to free him from the burden of his legal debts. But, unless matters came to a crisis at once—unless his engagement to Catherine could be announced speedily, would Holroyd hold his peace? Of course in that matter of his suspicion, Roger felt confident that the tutor would not dare to speak. But how about an accumulation of fact, which might be adduced to his serious detriment, at the present moment?

Roger came to the conclusion that no time was to be lost. If this thing was to be done, it must be done quickly.

CHAPTER XV.

It had been snowing all night, and now in the morning there was a hard frost and a brilliant sun shining upon the frozen snow, and upon the scarlet breasts of the robins who sat, waiting for crumbs, upon the sill of Catherine's window.

She was always an early riser. She dressed herself this morning with more alacrity than usual, ran down-stairs, and let herself into the garden by the glass door, which was next to the school-room. As she passed the window, she saw Holroyd standing there, and acting with her accustomed impulse, she beckoned to him to join her.

He was not surprised, as many men would have been; nor did any fatuous delusion exhilarate him. He understood why she desired to speak to him. A minute or two later he had overtaken her in the little pathway that had already been swept clear of snow through the shrubbery. She held out her hand.

"Tell me what you did yesterday. Is it all right?"

"I paid Barton, and I have got Roger Davenport's acknowledgment of the debt. So far, all is right. But he suspects, as I knew he would, from whom the money comes."

She flushed. "Did he attempt to refuse the—the loan?"

"No. He is not a man likely to refuse 'a loan!'" said Holroyd with a bitter smile.

"Do you mean that he has no pride? No sense of humiliation? I can't believe it!" she exclaimed quickly.

He remained silent. Their footsteps crunched along over the frozen gravel, and there was no other sound but the rustle of falling snow, when the flight of a bird shook down a shower from the overladen branches.

"After all," she continued resolutely, "he is a gentleman; whatever his faults and follies are, you can not deny that he is a gentleman."

Still he made no reply. His brow was knit; his eyes turned to her as she spoke, and then bent downward. Even Catherine could not but see that his silence was caused by some internal struggle; some difficulty as to what he should say. But with all a woman's persistence, she determined he should speak.

"You said yesterday that your opinion of Mr. Roger Davenport could be of no importance to me. Supposing I were to tell you that it *is*? Supposing I were to ask you, as a friend, to tell me, candidly, why you, who were his tutor, and should know him well, are so prejudiced against him—as of course I can't fail to see that you are?"

"It is because I am still his brother's tutor—still eating Sir Norman's bread, that I can not speak to you 'candidly,' Miss Johnstone. I can only tell you that this is what I would say to Roger if he were here, 'You come of an ancient stock: your mother is a true lady: you were bred at Eton, you have always associated with your equals: you are regarded as a model by a certain class of men, and are idolized by a certain class of women. If this constitutes being a gentleman, you are one.' I will not say more than this, unless—unless you tell me that your future happiness depends on my reply. If you say that it does, I will give up my appointment in this house, and speak my mind of Roger Davenport."

"Of course I should not let you do that," returned Catherine quickly. "Besides, although I can not help liking and admiring Mr. Davenport (I admit that)—I have known him so short a time, it is absurd to suppose I can have any—any—any real feeling about him, except interest, and pity, and—and a desire to befriend him. It is this makes me wish for the unbiased opinion of one who has known him as long as you have done."

He made a movement, as though to interrupt her; but stopped himself and she continued,

"His mother has warned me against him, and so has another woman. I understand both: Lady Davenport's sensitive nobility, and my friend's prudential dread—yes, I understand both; but they are women. What I want is a man's opinion—a man's whom I can trust."

"You know nothing of me. Why should you trust *me*?" he asked, giving her a quick side-glance.

"Well, I scarcely know," she replied, with an attempt at a laugh. "Certainly not from any encouragement you have given me."

"No—I have avoided you—I would have avoided *this*; but it has been forced on us both. Don't ask me to speak—for I can not, as long as I am here. Only this I will say, and I would repeat it before his mother. Do what you like for Roger—give him everything you possess—but don't marry him."

"He has not yet asked me. But, it is all very well to talk of 'giving him everything I possess.' Who would marry me, do you think, if I were beggared? You know that my money is my chief attraction—not only to Mr. Roger Davenport."

"Yes, to most men it is so, no doubt."

"Be frank. Do you believe there is a single exception?"

"I think it possible there is—and that you will never know it. If such a man grows to love you—perhaps in spite of himself—he will shrink more and more from avowing it, lest you should class him with the herd of mercenaries. However," he added with a sharp change of tone, "this is beside the question. It rests with you to decide whether your benevolence to Roger is to end here. Unless he meets with encouragement from you, he will go abroad at once."

"It seems as if I were driving him away from home. Perhaps I had better not remain here?"

"That would not affect his movements, and only increase Sir Norman's difficulties."

"What will Mr. Roger Davenport do abroad? Will he try and get his livelihood in any way?" she inquired after a pause.

"Ask him," he replied, with ill-repressed scorn. "He has told his mother: he will probably try and work upon your feelings in a like manner."

"But"—she hesitated—"may it not make a difference now—now that his debts are paid?"

Those were only his *legal* debts. He has debts of honor, which—unless he can meet them—will prevent his showing his face in society again."

"Then his only hope is in being able to marry some one with money? Well, if I could feel sure of redeeming him, it would be as good an object to devote mine to as any other, perhaps."

"You don't believe that," he returned, with a quick anger which flushed his face for a moment or two. You have too good brains to believe that by paying his gambling debts, you can reform a man who must marry for money—(it is you who say it, not I). And you have eyes too; unless they are blinded. I can only tell you to use them; and then ask yourself whether, Roger Davenport being what he is, there is no better object to which you can devote your fortune."

She was silent. Of course she understood what he referred to; and he knew that she understood. It was a branch of the subject she would not touch upon with Holroyd. The man's strength impressed her strangely—a little disagreeably perhaps. But his words left a deep impression.

* * * * *

Later in the day, Philip Holroyd was closeted for nearly an hour with Lady Davenport. Though they discussed Roger's position

freely, Catherine's name was not mentioned. Holroyd cautiously avoided letting escape any word that should betray her secret. He advised that no opposition should be offered to her son's going abroad, if, indeed he was resolved on that course. India, perhaps, would be the best place for him: with interest, it might be possible to procure him some small post there. At all events, it was manifest that the life he had hitherto led must now come to an end.

It was still a bright day after the heavy snow, which fell in showers of powder now and again from the boughs of the silver larches. Every one was out; some skating on the pond, some walking discreetly on its banks; Catherine in a sledge, which had just been sent her from London, with Mrs. Hare beside her, both swathed in furs. Catherine looked to particular advantage behind the handsome bay pony with its jingling bells. Her perfect command over the high-mettled little cob, whom the frosty air and his unwonted gear excited somewhat perilously, roused general admiration from the men.

"By Jove!" cried Mountjoy, as he skated up to Roger, who was performing some gyrations not far from the bank where Miss Johnstone had drawn up. "That girl is A 1 with the ribbons. It would take you all you know, my boy, to drive that animal!"

"You mean the cob, not the girl, I suppose?" Roger said this with his usual soft smile and low voice; then he skimmed off like a bird, wheeling round and round, poising himself now on one leg, now on the other, with an easy grace which not even all good skaters possess. Finally he drew up beside the sledge, whose owner he knew had been watching him.

"Won't you put on your skates and take a turn? Driving—even your fiery little brute—must be cold work to-day."

"But I *can* drive, and I can't skate—at least very badly."

"Let me give you a lesson. Put yourself under my care—you sha'n't fall."

"Miss Johnstone, you are not going to leave me?" cried Mrs. Hare. "I won't stay a minute in the sledge, if you get out. Mr. Davenport is a perfect Mephistophiles, leading you to your destruction—only it is on the ice, instead of into the fire."

But some one came up to Mrs. Hare's side of the sledge at that moment and spoke to her. She turned her head to answer him, and Roger, who had leaped up on the bank, and was leaning on the sledge close to Catherine's shoulder, said in a low voice,

"I am going to London to-morrow, or Monday."

"Are you? I am sorry. Why do you go?"

"I have to make arrangements for going abroad."

"Going abroad?"

"Yes. Come on the ice, and I'll tell you all about it."

"How can I forsake Mrs. Hare?"

"Your groom is here—he can drive her home: or she can walk."

He felt confident that Catherine would yield: she did so. He sounded her weakness: he had no conception of her strength. She was in his eyes an intelligent *bourgeoise*, consumed by a craving to become a fashionable woman, who might attain her end by marrying him, and was in the meantime far from insensible to his personal attractions. She was presentable in appearance; she was

bright and pleasant in conversation: common sense told him he might wait a long time before he found so advantageous a bargain; and time was just the only thing it was impossible for him to waste, in his present strait. Every hour was precious: he must risk something: he must precipitate affairs, though he felt that an avowal was premature, and could only be justified by exceptional circumstances.

"Now, lean on me, and throw out your feet boldly, right and left. Don't be afraid."

"I am awkward. I am not afraid."

"No—you are above such petty feminine weakness. No woman could drive that animal of yours who had not plenty of nerve. I sometimes ask myself whether your pluck would enable you to brave the world's opinion—whether it is possible you would link your lot with one against whom all your friends—even his own mother—had cautioned you. This seems to you very sudden, does it not? Do not be angry—do not reply hastily. If you knew how I was situated, you would understand that I am driven to speak to you now, for if you give me no hope, I shall leave England almost immediately—for years, perhaps forever."

"*Forever!* How can you talk so, Mr. Davenport? You do not mean to insinuate that love for me will drive you abroad?"

"No, I do not." They had gradually slackened their pace, until now they were standing under the shelter of an old holly, at the further end of the pond. "I admire your character, your intellect, which are so superior to my own, and I feel your ennobling influence every day more and more. I believe that I should be perfectly happy, if you consented to marry me, and that I should become a better man than I have a chance of becoming in any other way. But I have fancied myself too often *in love* to degrade you by any passionate protestations. Others will make ~~them~~ to you: I affect nothing I do not feel: I tell you the simple truth. You are made to be my redemption, if you will. If not—I shall go to the devil."

This speech was ably devised; Roger did not "protest too much," he said what was well calculated to move the girl who admired and pitied him, though she was too keen-sighted to have believed any ardent avowal of devotion, had he been stupid enough to make one. She parried his direct appeal by a return to the original question.

"You are going abroad, I understand, because you have debts of honor you can not meet? Instead of flying, would it not be braver to go to the men to whom you owe this money, and say, 'I can not pay you now, but give me time and you shall be paid to the utmost farthing. I will work, I will save, and will not touch a card nor make a bet, till I am free from this burden.' Would not such a course be braver—more honorable, than ignominious flight?"

"The men I live with are not used to such a course. If a man breaks, he must fly. I could never show my face among them if I continued to live in England. New Zealand—anywhere would be better. Besides, there are other reasons against my remaining here—other dangers I can't talk to *you* about. It is better I should go quite away, unless I have a hope of winning *you*."

"Mr. Davenport, you have been frank, and I thank you. I will be equally so. Of course I know that my money must be my first

and chief attraction in your eyes. I am not a fool, and I am aware that I must make up my mind to *that*, whomever I marry. I like you, but I really know very little of you—too little to intrust my future to a man against whom, as you know, I have been warned, and who acknowledges himself so weak that he is forced to fly from dangers which he can not even name to me. If, instead of this, you faced and overcame them—if you would prove to your detractors that you are made of better stuff than they believe, and would work steadily for two years at anything—no matter what—I believe I should marry you, supposing that you asked me. But I can hold out no other ‘hope’ than this; and understand it is not a promise—I know you too little to bind myself. It is only a possibility depending mainly upon yourself.”

He held her hand, and his handsome eyes were lowered, she could only see their dark lashes; but the mouth under its silky mustache she could read, and it became more and more rigid. The soft, persuasive lips hardened into an expression she did not recognize. It was momentary, however; when she ceased to speak, the suave lines of the face were recomposed.

“It all seems easy to you, Miss Johnstone; but do you think my education has fitted me to work? Do you think the example of my father, of my associates, of the world in which I live, is likely to make me strong to resist temptation? They never deny themselves anything they want. Can you wonder that, seeing this going on around me ever since I was an Eton boy, I should be what I am? As to work, what could I do now? I might have gone into the army, but it is too late to think of that. Can you imagine me sitting at a desk in a government office? If I knew foreign languages I might be a queen’s messenger; that is one reason why I had better go abroad. If there was any one to encourage me to study—any one who cared enough for me to sacrifice her life to a *vaurien*, I might do something. As it is—”

He left his sentence incomplete, and sighed. Catherine’s sensibility was touched. It was certainly true that he had known nothing but bad example, that he had been exposed to great temptation, that he was still very young. Might it not be true, also, that a woman’s influence could reclaim him? But though she asked herself this, she was too clever not to see almost instantaneously the obvious rejoinder which shaped itself into these words:—

“The woman who is to perform this part with any chance of success must be one *you love*—not one you select from—other considerations. If you can’t resist present temptation, with a view of winning the latter, what chance has she of effecting this wonderful reformation by and by? I am heartily sorry for you—a great deal you say is quite true, I know; but I don’t believe in a reformation dependent upon a good income. If I ‘sacrificed’ my life to you now, I should do it with my eyes open, knowing that you would amuse yourself after marriage very much as you have done hitherto, and that I should have to pay your debts whatever they were. As to that, however, I care nothing about money; but I should be a fool, any girl must be, who marries a man over whom she feels she has no influence—and can I delude myself into fancying I have any over you?”

"Have you not seen me trying to free myself from other influence?" he asked, in a low voice. "It is very difficult to shake off an intimacy of habit, but I have been trying to do this, out of my growing regard for you, my gradual conviction that you were the one woman in the world who might reclaim me, if she chose."

She paused a moment or two, before she replied.

"I will make a confession to you, which, perhaps, I ought not to make. I don't know—I have *tried* to have this conviction. I have tried to believe that I might perhaps become the good genius in your life—but what ground have I for such an idea? We have known each other scarcely a month, and during most of that time you have not attempted to conceal your admiration for another person. How am I to feel sure that you are sincere in what you now say? Time alone can prove it. Break away from your old associates, your old habits. Show me that I have really some active influence over your life. Then, and not till then, I may listen to you."

Roger bit his lip. To be baffled in his plans by this odd, outspoken girl, who openly owned her preference for him, was doubly irritating. But though her obstinacy upset all his calculations, he was too clever to persist where he saw it would be useless.

"You are wise," he said at last. "The world will applaud your decision. You alone, perhaps, one day, may think with regret that you might have saved me, but *prudently* abstained. I shall break away from old associations, Miss Johnstone—yes—but, perhaps, the change may not be for the better."

"It is getting cold here," she said with a little shiver.

Then he seized her hand again, and they skated rapidly away.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE following day, Saturday, Roger did not go to London, but he wrote to Mr. Israels, who was Mr. Barton's partner, and with whom he preferred transacting business, making an appointment on Monday, after which he drove over to Brookwood, where Mrs. Courtland was reported to have had an accident, and to be confined to her sofa. Some of the guests departed that day; others remained on till over the C—— ball, on the following Tuesday.

By Sunday morning the snow was gone; it was a mild, windless day. Lady Davenport always went to church twice. But she never expected her guests to go, or asked any questions. If they were minded to attend divine service, the church, being a stone's-throw from the house, was within the reach of all; there could be no question of a carriage. The only individuals upon whom she laid any moral pressure in this matter were Malcolm and the servants. The boy took part in the choir, and he was generally in his place in the afternoon, as well as in the morning. The maid-servants mostly congregated to church at three o'clock, when their household work was done. Indeed, at that hour, on a fine Sunday, as this was, there were often not more than two or three servants left in the house; those who were not in church taking a walk, or visiting their friends in the village.

It so chanced that Malcolm that afternoon had a headache. His mother knew it was no excuse, for the boy was genuinely fond of singing in the choir, and punctually attended every practice. He had a custom, dating from his childhood, of lying down on a certain sofa in his mother's bedroom, if he ever felt unwell. This sofa was associated with headaches in the boy's mind, and yet no other sofa in the house, he fancied, could rest and soothe him like this old chintz-covered couch. It stood against the wall on the further side of the huge four-post bed, as one entered the room, and was partly concealed from view until one reached the foot of the bed.

Malcolm fell asleep, and here his mother found him when she returned from church.

She bent over him. "How do you feel now?"

"I have still a headache, mother."

"You were not disturbed, I hope? You generally sleep it off."

"I *was* disturbed—somebody came in—I forget—"

"Why, all the maids were at church, my boy! Nobody could have come in here. You must have been dreaming."

"No, I wasn't. I remember now, it was Roger. I heard a noise—something clicking—and I started up, and there he was at the foot of the sofa. It startled me, I don't know why, and sent the blood to my head. I asked him what he wanted, and he called me a milksop and a whining fool, and asked what the devil I was doing here? And then he went away, but it made my head worse."

Lady Davenport knew there was no love lost between her sons. Roger was not long-suffering of his younger brother's infirmities; and Malcolm's was far from being a large, generous nature, incapable of retaliation. The retaliation was, indeed, generally covert; he seldom openly complained of Roger's treatment, or avowedly betrayed any of his brother's malpractices of which he might become cognizant. But Lady Davenport was perfectly aware of the source whence Lady Retford derived much of the information which deepened that lady's dislike to her elder nephew. And the poor mother, though wise and just in her own estimate of her favorite son, and in her own conduct as regarded him, felt sorely on this point, and perhaps less impartial than she believed herself to be in judging his brother's behavior.

"You know that Roger does not mean half he says. Why do you repeat it? It is an ugly habit, Malcolm, a habit unworthy of a man. A few words spoken in haste—you should attach no importance to them. You should not tell me, or tell your aunt, that they made your head worse—it is like a silly girl."

Lady Davenport spoke with a sharpness unusual to her, as she turned away.

Roger said to his mother that evening, as he wished her "good-night."

"I am going to town by the first train with Mountjoy. I have business which will keep me all day, but I shall be back in the evening."

"Pray don't be late. Some more people are to arrive to-morrow for this ball on Tuesday."

"All right. I shall be back for dinner."

"Does Lord Mountjoy return?"

"No, his leave is up; but I asked some more men down, who may try their luck with your heiress, if they please."

Then Lady Davenport guessed pretty well how the land lay.

Catherine wrote in her journal that night as follows:—

"It is all over. The scales have fallen from my eyes. I no longer think that a marriage with Roger Davenport could ever be for my happiness. I am very sorry for him, I feel a deep interest in him still; but I could never continue to love a man whom I saw to be so inherently weak as he is. Perhaps Mr. Holroyd may be too hard on him; but Roger's own words to me on Friday convicted him. I was to accept him unconditionally, now or never. He declined any probation, just as he shrunk from the prospect of any hard work. He talked of my 'influence,' but what influence could I ever obtain over him, if he would not submit to these conditions? He was asking me to marry him solely because I am rich. I know that I shall probably go through the world without finding one man who cares about me for myself alone. I do not believe that I have the power of inspiring any strong passion; but at least I will not marry a man whom I despise. His allusion to Mrs. Courtland—his insinuation that he was trying to break away from her—filled me with amazement, and I must say, contempt. If he thought to commend himself to me by it, he was mistaken."

"My Sunday has not been a very cheerful one, but an incident at its close has amused me, though it confirmed my impression of the way in which I am regarded, and must be content to be regarded, even by a man like little Lord Mountjoy. He proposed to me, and I have not yet known him *quite* five days! When I laughingly reminded him of this, as an adequate reason for my not at once accepting the honor of his hand, he seemed honestly surprised. He said, putting his little red face very near mine:

"Well, it's a little sudden, perhaps; but you see I'm going away to-morrow morning, and so I've no time to lose. I know you've given Roger the sack—I could tell that by what he said last night—or else, of course, I wouldn't interfere with him. Honor among thieves, you know."

"What was it Mr. Davenport said that led you to your conclusion?" I asked quickly. I was outraged at the idea of his having alluded in the smoking-room to what passed between us. Lord Mountjoy's answer reassured me.

"He said that he must cut off to the Continent very soon; that all chance of his being able to remain in England was at an end. I knew what that meant. So I thought I might as well try my luck. We should get on awfully well together, I'm sure. I think you are one of the jolliest girls I ever met, else I wouldn't have asked you to marry me—I wouldn't indeed."

"I thanked him for the compliment, and said I felt sure he would not be unkind to me; but that I had resolved not to marry until I was in love, 'And you see, I am not in love with you, Lord Mountjoy,' I added.

"He urged that it was more important for two people to be likely to 'get on well,' as he called it, than that they should be in love, a condition to which the frank little man made no pretense. He liked

me, and he had a home, a name, a position to offer me, with complete independence; he would never attempt to control me.

"I did not reply, as I felt inclined, that this was the last thing I desired in a husband; that the man I marry must be one to whom I would sacrifice all, and to whose control I should look as the ruling law of my life. Some words of Mr. Holroyd's to-day crossed my mind.

"We met in the hall, and as it was the first time I had seen him alone since our interview the other morning, I said:

"Thank you for your advice to me on Friday. I now know how wise it was."

"You acted upon it, then?"

"I suppose I did in some degree. At all events, I have no longer any delusions on the subject we discussed. Mr. Davenport spoke to me, and I answered him very openly; so my motives in doing what I did for his mother's sake can not be misinterpreted. As far as lies in my power, I will lighten her anxieties; and you must help me to do this, Mr. Holroyd. If you know that the family is in any great strait, out of which money can take them, you must come to me."

"He looked at me with a strange expression which I can hardly characterize; but I thought there was a touch of sarcasm in the smile, and in the tone, when he replied:

"If you dissipate your fortune thus, have you calculated the loss to yourself in the world's estimation?"

"It was these words that recurred to me to-night, when Lord Mountjoy asked me to be his wife. Would this good-humored little fellow be so desirous of conferring on me the honor of his hand, if he knew that I was disposed to 'dissipate my fortune' thus in irrational generosity? There is not one man, no, not one of all those I have met since I came here, who would take me, thus 'heavily handicapped,' as Mr. Charles Thane would express it."

The following day, Roger took the first train to London, and at luncheon Catherine announced her intention of riding over to inquire for Mrs. Courtland, after her accident.

"She slipped and fell, didn't she?" asked Mrs. Latour.

"One would have thought she was used to that," said Mrs. Hare, examining the roses on her Dresden china plate.

"Used to it? I can not understand being used to falling!" was Mrs. Latour's innocent response.

Mrs. Hare did not raise her eyes, but murmured softly:

"Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte."

Lady Retford screwed up her eyes opposite, and laughed.

"And when that 'pas' is a 'faux pas' people go on slipping, and falling, very easily—ha! ha!"

"You English ladies, I do think, must be the most uncharitable in the world," cried Catherine. "You are so pitiless on each other, and you never seem to give any one the benefit of a doubt!"

She happened to catch Holroyd's eye as she said this; and the glance she met was her reward.

It was a mild afternoon. She rode at a foot's pace, after cantering through the park, and her horse sunk up to his fetlocks in the slushy

high-road, so that she had leisure to analyze her own motives in deciding suddenly, as she had done, to pay this visit. "Why am I going to see Mrs. Courtland? A week since I was jealous of her; now that feeling is extinct. Is it in consequence of the manner in which Roger spoke of her on Saturday? I believe, as his mother said, that he cares no more for Mrs. Courtland, seriously, than he does for me. But in spite of Lady Davenport, in spite of all the things I hear of this foolish little woman, I feel for her. I suppose I have no business to do so, but is one forbidden to be sorry for, and to try and save, if it be possible, the silly moth that is flying toward the candle?" It was past four o'clock when she reached the village of Brook, which was also one of the stations on the London line, though not the nearest to Davenport.

Mrs. Courtland was lying on a sofa in her boudoir. She looked ill, and seemed strangely restless and depressed. Her fair hair hung about her in a disorder which was far from unbecoming; and to Catherine's fancy she was more interesting, more attractive thus, than in all the bravery of a ball-dress which displayed perhaps too liberally her beautiful figure. It is possible she knew this.

"How kind of you to come and see me!" she said. "No one else has done more than send to inquire how I was. That is the way of the world—it takes all you can give it, till you are ill or in trouble, and then—good-by!"

Catherine secretly felt that there was some truth in Mrs. Courtland's complaint; but she replied:

"If you were poor and solitary, no doubt it would be different. But you have a husband and children, and plenty of money. What can you want of the world's sympathy?"

"In the first place, my husband is always away, and if he were here—well! I had better say nothing about him. Then I have no maternal instincts. I can't help it. I try to interest myself about the children, but I can't. A few of the dull hunting men about here occasionally drop in on an off-day, and bestow their weariness on me; but I want something different from that. I want a woman-friend—one I can trust—and I haven't one. Every woman likes the sympathy of her own sex, however much she may pretend to be indifferent to it. If I was ever about to commit any act of egregious folly, Miss Johnstone, I believe a kind woman's voice, a firm hand, that I knew was that of a true friend, might stop me. But I should never get it here. There is Lady Davenport, who is thought such a model, she is as hard and cold as a stone. I have done all I could to make her friendly to me, but she hates me—she hates any woman whom men like or admire."

"I do not come under that category," laughed Catherine, and the laugh was tinged with a little bitterness foreign to her large, liberal nature. "I do not believe she *hates* any one. She is like Justice—a little stern, perhaps, but even-handed."

"It is justice without mercy."

"Has she not had plenty to forgive? That may make her less indulgent, where she thinks that indulgence will only encourage folly."

"You mean that I am very foolish?" she said, leaning forward.

And it seemed to Catherine, in the waning light, that there were tears in her eyes. There was but one answer possible to this.

"Yes, I am afraid you are."

"But isn't everybody foolish about you, except your immaculate Lady Davenport? It is so difficult to be wise. It is so difficult to *know*. Ah! if one could but know!"

"Know what?" asked Catherine, bluntly.

"Oh! so many things—or rather one thing—only one. But no matter. Tell me what you think of the Davenports as a family? You have a bad opinion of Sir Norman, of course? He is a horrid old scamp, and has been the ruin of the family."

"To a great extent, I suppose, but not entirely."

"You mean that poor Roger has helped to complete what his father began? Well, and whose fault has that been? Sir Norman's, who set him the example. *You* are not going to be hard on him, I hope! You pity him? I am sure you do—in your heart." And she looked into Catherine's face with keen scrutiny.

"No," returned her visitor, deliberately, "I don't. I believe I did, but I see that I was a fool to do so. A young man may be extravagant, may get into debt, but why doesn't he work? If he had any self-respect he would not be a burden—a burden which he is continually making heavier—to his parents. He says he is going abroad very soon."

Mrs. Courtland waited a moment before she said, "I see. He has proposed to you, then, and of course you have refused him."

"Is it 'of course?'" Ask Mr. Davenport if you want to know; but this is one of the questions which ought never to be asked or be answered, in my opinion."

"I *am* answered. I asked because I am a great friend of poor Roger's, and am deeply interested in him. I do believe it would be the very best thing for him if he married you. I do indeed."

"And for me? But you are mistaken; it would be good for neither of us, except in so far as that his present debts would be paid."

"You think that he would only marry you for your money, then?"

"What do *you* think?" returned Catherine, looking her full in the face. "You are his great friend, and ought to know." Mrs. Courtland colored, and seemed taken aback. The other continued, after a moment's pause, "I am told that Mr. Davenport is not capable of any strong attachment—that he has never known anything beyond a passing fancy for any one. Until he finds a woman capable of binding him with a strong chain—he had better not marry at all."

"What woman will be wise enough to *know* if her chain be strong enough?" and Mrs. Courtland turned away, with a little uneasy laugh. It was growing dusk; she rose and rang the bell: and then approached the clock on the mantel-piece.

"It is only half-past four, but you will have some tea before you go?"

Then Catherine rose, and declared she must be starting, so as to reach home before it grew quite dark. She felt—she scarcely knew why, a vague impression that Mrs. Courtland was not anxious, for some reason or other, that she should prolong her visit. And yet, as soon as she held out her hand, the little woman seemed unaffectedly

distressed to part with her, and made her promise to return in a few days' time.

"You will not be at the ball to-morrow night, I suppose?" asked Catherine.

"I don't know. It depends on how I feel. Yes, I shall go if I possibly can, though I shall not be able to dance; but to sit on a hard bench, with people round one, is better than to lie on a sofa in solitude here."

"She is a mystery!" thought Catherine, as she rode home. "If she cared the least for Roger, she would not say that it would be the best thing for him to marry me! I know that Lady Davenport is right; she is neither a good wife, nor a good mother. She is vain, impulsive, and an outrageous flirt; but all the women shun her, and she clings to me; she seems to want my friendship. Under all her frivolity, she is evidently unhappy, and therefore it is, I suppose, that I feel more interest in her than I do in the other women. I think I could obtain a little influence over her, in time. I never could have any over Mrs. Hare, or Mrs. Latour—the one too clever, the other too complete a fool, to need any help."

Just then, the shabby old dog-cart from Davenport passed her. Where was it going? she had the curiosity to turn round and ask her groom.

"It's a-goin' to Brook Station, miss, to meet Mr. Roger."

The down-train was due there at five. She now understood why Mrs. Courtland had not pressed her to remain longer.

CHAPTER XVII.

ROGER DAVENPORT stood in Mr. Israel's back shop; and the doors were closed.

Mr. Israel was a jeweler, well known to the gilded youth of London. In that branch of trade he had no partner, and transacted all his business himself. This often demanded tact, circumspection, and perfect command of temper. In none of these qualifications was Mr. Israel wanting. He was a smooth and oily—yet not offensively oily—man of forty, inclining to obesity, well dressed, invariably civil and discreet, in spite of any provocation; the very opposite, in every respect, of Barton, with whom he was associated in money-lending transactions. That he could not shake himself clear of this connection, was a great trial to Mr. Israel. The appearance and language of the insolent old usurer were a constant source of annoyance to his equally unscrupulous, but far more polished and diplomatic partner. The violence and the vindictiveness of the ill-educated elder man were regarded as reprehensively weak and impolitic by Israel; extreme measures should never be resorted to until it was manifest that by no possibility could the victim yield another drop of blood. He had been averse from seizing Roger's personal effects; and now that the young man's debt was discharged in full, he doubly regretted Barton's precipitancy, believing that all further transactions with Sir Norman's eldest son must be at an end. It was with unfeigned satisfaction, therefore, that he saw the heir to Davenport enter his shop. He at once led him into his private room.

"You behaved d——d badly, Israels, in sending down to seize my things the other day."

"I assure you, Mr. Davenport, it was not my fault. I regretted it extremely. If in any future little difficulty, you would be kind enough to come to ME, I would manage things more easily for you than Mr. Barton, who—"

"The infernal old brute! He had better not come in my way. I'll pound him to a jelly. No. I shouldn't dream of going to him. You've at least got a civil tongue in your head, Israels, though I believe you're just as big a scoundrel as your precious partner. I tell you that, just to show you I don't mean to be done, in the matter that brings me here to-day."

Mr. Israels smiled blandly, and opened his cigar case.

"Have a cheroot, Mr. Davenport? They're first-rate, I assure you. No. Well, sir, what can I do to oblige you?"

"It ain't a bill. You won't get me into your clutches again just at present. But you can oblige me and yourself also, perhaps. You don't, yourself, decide the value of jewels you buy, I suppose? There's some fellow, whose sole business it is to do this—isn't there?"

"I generally trust Mr. Zimeri in any case of importance—but I understand precious stones myself, pretty well. Have you anything here you wish to have valued?"

He pointed to the parcel. Roger looked up, as he untied the string: there was a shade of hesitation in his manner.

"Yes—and perhaps more than that. It would depend on the sum named."

"Perhaps, you had rather have Mr. Zimeri's opinion first?"

But the string was by this time untied; and Roger had produced an old-fashioned leather case. At the sight of it, a curious, transient smile touched the corners of Mr. Israels' thick red lips; but he said nothing, as Roger opened the case, and displayed the famous Davenport sapphires and diamonds. The Jew took out the necklace, and examined it minutely. He looked at the tiara, but with less care: as though he was already satisfied. The earrings he did not remove from the case.

Still he said not a word; and Roger, who stood opposite, watching his movements with knit brows, began to wax impatient. Mr. Israels walked leisurely to his desk, and wrote something on a slip of paper.

"Here is Mr. Zimeri's address, Mr. Davenport. Go to him, and hear what he says. I would rather he gave you his opinion first."

"What—what do you suppose it would cost to replace these—supposing they were sold—with—with false stones?"

Again the Jew smiled ever so faintly.

"I can't tell you now, Mr. Davenport. Go to Mr. Zimeri, and see what he says first."

A couple of hours later, Roger, looking as he rarely did, heated and discomposed, hurriedly entered the shop again.

"I have been to Zimeri—and to two other men—for I didn't believe him. Do you know what they all pretend?"

"They have told you the jewels are false, sir."

"It's a plant—you are all in with each other: but I'm not to be

caught so easily. These sapphires have been in my family over a hundred years, and have always till quite lately been kept at the bankers'."

"All right, sir," returned Mr. Israels, with imperturbable good-humor. "Take them round to the trade, and then—if you find what we tell you is correct, ask yourself"—here he dropped his voice, and leaned forward as though he feared that the walls might betray his suggestion—"ask yourself whether the substitution you contemplated may not have been already made by some one else."

Roger's face changed. He clinched his lips tight for a moment before he spoke.

"You don't mean—that my father—"

"I betray no secrets, Mr. Davenport, yours or any one else's. All I affirm is that the real jewels have, at some time or other, been replaced by false ones."

The young man brought down his fist upon the table with an oath. Conviction was borne in upon his mind: Sir Norman had been beforehand with him. Roger very rarely betrayed himself, as he did on this occasion. His face was white with passion, as he turned, without another word, to leave the shop. Unfortunately, it so happened that the venerable Hebrew who transacted business under the name of Barton, opened the door as the exasperated young man was about to pass out.

"D—n you! get out of my way, you old brute!"—and hitting out straight from his shoulder, he knocked Mr. Barton down into the gutter, and strode onward, without even turning to give a look at his prostrate enemy.

* * * * *

Toward dusk, that same afternoon, Lady Davenport entered her bedroom, and opened a secret drawer in her bureau, where the key of the fire-proof cupboard in the corner of the room was kept. She very rarely took out the jewels; but it had suddenly occurred to her that the clasp of her necklace when she wore it the other night had seemed insecure. She would run no risk to-morrow at this public ball, she must examine the fastening. But when she had opened the cupboard, the jewel case—as we know—was not there.

On the first shock of this discovery, she turned deadly pale, and leaned back against the sofa. Then she raised her hands to her head, and tried to steady her thoughts. After a minute they formed themselves only too distinctly. On Thursday the jewels had been safe; she had locked them away herself. The secret drawer where she kept the key of the cupboard was known but to two persons, Sir Norman and Roger. She never took out the jewels nor put them away in her maid's presence; and nothing else was kept in the same safe. No workman had been in her room of late. All pointed to one conclusion: the jewels had not been abstracted by a stranger. Roger had suggested selling them—an idea which she had indignantly repudiated—and he had been into her room when she was out the previous day. Malcolm's account of being disturbed by his brother, and of Roger's irritability, recurred to her. Then he had gone to London this morning. As, one by one, these facts flashed upon her mind, she groaned aloud. Then she started up, and paced the room for some minutes. Finally, she rang the bell for her maid

and sent a message to the ladies, begging them to excuse her from coming down to tea; she was not feeling quite well. To face them all, to keep up the ball of conversation in her present frame of mind, was beyond her power. Roger would be back in less than an hour now. Had he not promised to be back by this train? Until she had spoken to him, she felt she could not command herself sufficiently to see any one.

"Give orders that immediately Mr. Davenport returns, he is told that I wish to see him here at once—before he goes into the drawing-room."

But the train was due at the Davenport station soon after five, and Roger had not returned when the half-hour after six o'clock struck.

She had been sitting motionless on the sofa, listening for the distant sound of wheels; very cold as to her hands and feet (there was no fire in the grate; she rarely indulged in such luxury now), but colder as to her heart. Where could she look for comfort? That her son—her favorite, in spite of all his misdeeds—could be guilty of this, was the sorest trial of the many she had been called on to bear. And that he was guilty, she could hardly doubt. That was the worst of it! Her insight into his character made her feel it was not impossible. She had heard him say, not long since, that it did not signify what a man did, provided he was not found out. It had been said with a smile; but, not the less for that, had she the conviction that his life was governed by this principle alone.

There was no train due at Davenport again till long after the dinner hour. She rang her bell again.

"Did not the dog-cart go to the station for Mr. Davenport? Is it returned?"

"I will inquire, my lady."

Presently the woman came back saying that the dog-cart had gone to Brook Station, where Mr. Davenport had ordered it to meet him at five o'clock. It had not yet returned.

Lady Davenport gave a sigh of relief. The dread that he would not return at all—that he had never meant to return, had been growing stronger within her for the last half-hour. But it was clear that he had gone to Brooklands. He must soon be home now. And she tried to build up another belief as a refuge in her misery. Had he been bent upon actually pawning or selling the jewels, it was inconceivable that his thoughts should be sufficiently free to permit of his driving some miles out of his way home to philander with Mrs. Courtland. Whatever he had done in this matter, however culpable he might be, the mischief could not be irretrievable, if he returned to Davenport.

When, at a quarter-past seven, Roger jumped out of his dog-cart in the stable-yard, and was met by the message that her ladyship desired to see him immediately in her bedroom, he knew that the loss of the jewels had been discovered. He was prepared for this emergency. His original plan had been to leave the dining-room when the men sat over their wine, and when the servants were at supper, and replace the case in the safe, which he could certainly do then unobserved. Their abstraction at some later period, for a few days, when the false would have been substituted for the real

jewels, would, he had calculated, be equally easy. But he had always been prepared for their being missed, and now that his ill-luck to-day had pursued him by detection of his theft, he was in no way taken aback. To do him justice, he thought more at that moment of his mother—anomalous as it may seem—more of sparing her unnecessary pain, than of his imperiled reputation. Instead of taking off his fur-coat in the hall, he slipped up the back stairs with the parcel concealed in its capacious pocket.

His mother met him at the door of the room. Schooled as she was to conceal her emotions, her voice shook, as she exclaimed,

“Oh! Roger, what have you done?”

“Do you mean about your sapphires?” he asked, with a laugh, which he was conscious did not sound quite natural. “Here they are. I took them up to have them valued.”

“And did you think—did you really think—I or your father would ever consent to their being sold?”

A smile, more natural, but not a very pleasant smile, curled his handsome mouth.

“I think my father might have been brought to consent. However, you may dismiss the matter from your mind. I promise you to take no further steps in the matter.”

“I can not so easily dismiss from my mind the idea that you meditated a dishonorable act. You have wounded me, Roger, in a way that nothing else could have done.”

“I am sorry—why the deuce did you go to the safe? You would have known nothing about it. But don’t bother yourself any more. It is all right.”

“No!” she rejoined, with a vehemence to which Roger had never before seen his mother give way, “it is not all right. It never can be, as long as you lead this life of deceit and dishonesty. For it is dishonest, Roger. If your course is not arrested, if you go on as you have been doing, you will bring ruin and disgrace on all around you. I would sooner see you digging by the roadside than continuing to lead the life you do.”

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

“You will not see it continue long, I fancy—I shall cut across the water. Digging by the roadside would not suit me, and there seems nothing else left to be done here.”

“Because you will not work. Because you lead a life of utter idleness—and worse. Look at Mr. Holroyd. Think how he was thrown among extravagant companions, when a very young man, and how he pulled himself up, changed his course of life, worked hard, and supported his mother in comfort till she died. He is honored and respected by every one, and so might you be, Roger, all the more for showing strength of will to drag yourself up out of the slough into which you have sunk. Mr. Holroyd—”

“Oh! I’m sick of his name. I hate the prig. I’ve heard of nothing but his virtues; I’ve had him crammed down my throat ever since I was eighteen. And he is no better than the rest of us, after all,” he added, with a sneer, seizing the opportunity to divert his mother’s attention into another channel. “He is a sly old fox, but I see his little game. He means to go in for your heiress—unless I’m very

much mistaken; and when he is left alone here he will have all the running to himself."

He did not, in his heart, believe what he said; he had a conviction that the tutor was seriously, honestly in love; but it suited his purpose to advance the other theory, which was, at least, plausible.

Here the dressing-gong sounded. Lady Davenport replied:

"Your suspicion shows how blinded you are by prejudice. His avoidance of Miss Johnstone is quite marked. He really never speaks to her, if he can help it."

"Doesn't he? I think I could prove to you that they have had a good deal of secret communication—though they do appear so distant to each other in public. But the gong has sounded, and I must go and have my bath before dinner."

Thus he closed the interview with his mother. She felt that it would be useless at that moment to revert to the subject which was of far graver import to them both than Philip Holroyd's hopes and machinations—if any such existed. She must let him go now; but her heart was sore oppressed. There was nothing that she could appeal to in her son's indurated nature; and she knew it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE were several additions to the house-party at Davenport that evening; and Catherine was interested, as it was her nature to be, in meeting strangers, and in hearing all that was to be learned of their characters and history.

Charley Thane took her in to dinner. She had at last begun to understand why this young man, in spite of his impudence, not wholly free from affectation, was generally popular. In the first place, his good-humor was always unruffled, his self-complacency imperturbable. Those are possessions which make the wheels of life run very smooth. Then he had seen a great deal of the world, at home and abroad; and was by no means so empty-headed as he at first appeared. His reading had been desultory, but it embraced a great variety of books. Catherine was amused to learn that his studies had occasionally even a definite object in view. He was now engaged upon a course of theology, he told her—"for a fellow ought to have some religion—don't you think so, Miss Johnstone?" To which she heartily agreed. Only it seemed to her, when he named the works he was engaged in perusing, that the faith to be constructed on these foundations would be somewhat rickety.

She had not had so much conversation with him before, as she now had. He had loyally refrained from interfering with Roger all the week. Catherine was to be "brought down" by Davenport, if possible; he had been given to understand that clearly on his arrival; and Mountjoy's feeble and futile attempts to divert the young heiress's interest into another channel he regarded as very unhandsome. But Roger had now, undisguisedly, as he expressed it, "thrown up the sponge." Why should he not go in and try his luck? He was to be here for two more days; and after that they would meet in London. He would do nothing precipitate; but she really did not seem a bad sort of girl—lots to say for her.

self—"a kind of girl, you know, that is sure to get on in society." He really might do much worse.

The result of which reasoning was that Catherine was well entertained during dinner, and sung Charley's praises to Mrs. Hare more frankly than was discreet, perhaps, when the ladies retired to the drawing-room.

"He is amusing, isn't he?" said Mrs. Hare plaintively. "But don't marry him, my dear, he wouldn't suit you."

"Marry him!" laughed Catherine. "What an idea! Does a man of that sort ever think of marrying? It is the first time he has ever condescended to say more than 'how d'ye do' to me."

"Ah! He will probably ask you another question before long. Forewarned is forearmed."

"I need no arms, I assure you," returned Catherine, quickly. "I believe you think I am a fool."

"I think, as regards men, you are a little, my dear," Mrs. Hare smiled pityingly. "You are so very innocent, you see. You don't know what wretches they all are."

"I don't believe it—I don't want to believe it. Men are very much what women make them, I fancy."

"What has Lady Davenport made of Sir Norman in five-and-twenty years?"

Catherine hesitated. "Perhaps she was not the right woman for him to have married. Perhaps a less good woman, but of a different character, might have exercised much more influence."

"And Roger?" Mrs. Hare looked long and sentimentally into Catherine's face, and then added slowly, "Are you under the delusion, my dear, that there exists the woman who could exercise any lasting influence over him?"

"Perhaps not," said Catherine, and turned away. But the next minute the desire to express her thought, and to illustrate it completely, which was characteristic of her, made her continue, "A man to be lastingly influenced by love must be a man, and I begin to see that Mr. Davenport, like his brother, is not manly. He looks so—but he isn't. He is weaker than a woman."

Then some one joined them, and no more was said on the subject.

Half an hour later Catherine was seated alone on a sofa a little apart from the rest, some of whom were seated at the whist-table, while most of the others were preparing to play a round game. Catherine detested cards. It was her only disqualification for country-house agreeability. It appeared unsocial to withdraw nightly from the circle, as she did; but she could not help it.

"This is the kind of sacrifice," she used to say, "which, as it can do no one any good, one is not called upon to make."

Charley Thane was generally the prime mover of these diversions; but upon this occasion he had meant to have devoted himself to Catherine. Two circumstances conspired to defeat this object: one, the persistence of Mrs. Latour, abetted by two young ladies, in declaring that they could not play without him; the other, that Catherine was no longer alone. Philip Holroyd, while apparently reading the newspaper, as he generally did of an evening, had looked up, and caught Catherine's eye. She smiled, and made a scarcely perceptible sign to him to come and talk to her. He had

put down his paper, and was now seated beside her, when Charley Thane turned round. He relegated "that confoundedly cheeky tutor" to the infernal regions, and then yielded to Mrs. Latour's solicitations that he would join the table.

The disproportion of causes to effects in life—the very small hinges upon which our actions turn—is a favorite theme of essayists. Catherine would not have made that little sign to Holroyd but for Mrs. Hare's words, which had annoyed her. She saw that Thane meant to come and sit beside her, probably for the whole evening; and she knew the conclusions which Mrs. Hare and many others would draw. The young man had amused her at dinner well enough, and she had frankly said so; but he had never evinced any preference for her society hitherto; and if it were true that this sudden "change of front" meant more than that he found her tolerably good company, it was well to show at once that she did not mean to encourage one young man after another to treat her as a target, whereat his shafts of fascination were to be aimed. Mrs. Hare might be mistaken; it might only be her cynical way of regarding most human actions; but Catherine was a little vexed at the suggestion which she felt underlay the words. Could no man, then, make himself pleasant to her for an hour but that he must be actuated by greed for her money-bags? Yes; there was one man, at least, with whom she might converse without his being suspected of an interested motive. The tutor, whose avoidance of her had always been so marked, whom she was only beginning to know by slow degrees, but whom she already trusted as she did no other man in the house. She felt suddenly impelled to invite him to take the seat beside her. She began at once. "I want to talk to you about Mr. Davenport. When you spoke about his going abroad, the other day, I thought you cruel to suggest his banishment. But I have changed my mind. I believe it would be the best thing for him, to be got out of the way of temptation—somewhere in the colonies, where he would be separated from—all his old associates for a few years."

"Unless you put him on a desert island, I am afraid he will never be out of the way of temptation—but, no doubt, he would be better in the colonies than here, or at the gambling-tables abroad."

"Well, I have been thinking of a way in which I might serve him—if he would consent to be so served. Our business in Melbourne is now carried on by a man who arrived there, as a boy, without shoes and stockings, and whom my father took into the house, at first as a sort of errand-lad, I believe. He afterward became a clerk, and proved himself to be so clever and trustworthy, that he virtually conducted the business before my father's death, and when that event took place it was found my father had left him the whole concern, charged with a certain debt to me. Mr. Grogan would do anything in the world for me—anything, that is to say, which he did not think wrong. If I wrote to him and said, 'A young Englishman is coming out to Melbourne, you must find a post for him with a good salary; if not, you must make one—let him be your private secretary, or something of the kind'—I know Mr. Grogan would do it."

Philip Holroyd did not speak for some minutes. It was his habit

to take refuge in silence when perplexed, instead of saying what he did not mean, or something which should mean nothing at all. At last he replied slowly, "I am afraid Mr. Grogan would regret it."

"But is one to do nothing to try and help him?" she exclaimed impetuously. "Is one to turn one's back on a young man who is wasting his energies, and bringing misery on every one connected with him, when, by opening a door, it is possible he might be led into another course of life?"

"I did not say so," returned Philip calmly. "'It is never too late to mend.' If Roger consents to go out to Melbourne and to work, by all means give him the chance. What I meant was, that by writing to insist upon Mr. Grogan's finding a high-salaried post for him, you were placing that gentleman in a difficult, perhaps, even a dangerous position. Any such post must be one of trust."

He looked at her steadily as he spoke. She could not but understand this implication, and her cheek flushed.

"Do you mean that a young man in Mr. Davenport's station—a man who, both on his father's and mother's side, has some of the best blood in England in his veins—is not to be recommended to a position of trust? And all because he has run into debt! Really, Mr. Holroyd, you are too hard—I might say, cruel."

"You urged me the other day, Miss Johnstone, to give you my candid opinion of Roger. I declined to do so, except in a very modified way. You ask my advice now concerning him, and I have given it you as I could. I would not have done so to any one else. If you think me cruel, I can not help it."

"You have been a soldier, and your ideas of duty and discipline and reliability are very strict, I believe. You are as hard upon your own sex, Mr. Holroyd, as all these good ladies here are on theirs."

"I never judge man or woman superficially. I do not trust what are called 'first impressions.' My first impression of you, for instance, was entirely different from the one I now have. I am a close observer. Where no opportunity is given me for close observation, I keep my judgment in suspense."

"You certainly have had plenty of opportunity of judging Mr. Davenport. Still, I can not help feeling that you are unduly prejudiced against him. He is so young, and has not had fair play."

The answer that rose to Holroyd's lips he checked.

"You are like the generality of the world in this, and in this only," he said with one of his rare smiles, "that you ask for advice, being resolved beforehand only to follow it if it agrees with your own views."

"I am not aware that I did ask for your advice," returned Catherine, laughing, "but you, like the generality of the world, offered it." Then seeing that he looked annoyed, she added quickly, "Forgive me! I didn't mean that. Of course I wanted your opinion, even if I didn't ask it in so many words. But I should be so glad now, for his mother's sake, and—and—every one else, if he could be got abroad, far—very far away, somewhere. It would be such a relief to me, on every account."

Philip saw what was passing in her mind, but he had the tact not to refer to it explicitly.

"Try and obtain any independent evidence you can as to Roger's

fitness for the post you suggest. If what you learn is not satisfactory, he will, at any rate, have to go abroad somewhere, and that very soon. You may rely upon this."

She said nothing more; she thought it as well that the subject should not be pursued between them, and therefore it was that she asked him if his "observation" of various members of the assembled party had been sufficiently close to form an opinion concerning them? He answered more unreservedly than she had expected, and with less severity of judgment. Indeed, his leniency toward the younger men who were leading, apparently, much the same lives as Roger, struck her forcibly. And as regarded that problem which she was constantly trying to solve—Mrs. Hare's character—he said what seemed to her to be very probably the truth, though it had never occurred to her exactly in that light before.

"If she were not so clever, she might be wiser. Her cleverness is her snare. She is a bundle of contradictions, undisciplined contradictions. Sentiment and satire, large-heartedness and spite, admiration for what is good and pure, and a determination to follow her own course, whether right or wrong. She is so clever that she can persuade half the world, including herself, that she is deeply to be pitied. The other half, who persist in thinking she is to blame, are denounced as merciless Pharisees."

Presently, Catherine said laughing,

"I am very curious. You have discovered that, haven't you?"

"Yes, I should say your curiosity was insatiable."

"Well then, it is devouring me, and has been for the last half-hour, to know what was the 'erroneous impression' you formed of me at first. I dare say your present impression is just as erroneous, but of course you won't tell me that?"

He turned a deaf ear to the last implied inquiry, but said at once, "I will tell you my first impression, that you were a common-minded young woman, possessed with an inordinate idea of the value of your wealth, and a craving to be admitted to a society to which you did not naturally belong. I now know it was your curiosity and your restless activity of mind which made you wish to penetrate a world you knew nothing of, and which you have found out by this time, is not a better one than that you have left."

"If you mean that I like as well the society I was in before I came here, you are mistaken. I left one or two friends in Melbourne whom I love dearly; and if I had been thrown with bright, clever, nice people when I landed in England, I should have been quite contented, I should never have been seized with the wild desire to see what the 'fashionable life' I had read of was like. As it is, I am very, very glad I came here."

"So am I," said Holroyd in a low voice; then he added quickly, "your coming has been of great service to Lady Davenport—and I believe that you have learned the true worth of things you over-estimated perhaps. You see that people may be dull, and vulgar-minded, and worthless, though they belong to the 'best society in the land.'"

"Yes, but I also know that there are kind as well as pleasant people in it, some in whose lives I shall always take an interest, and one or two who I think will always be my fast friends. By the bye,

does it not strike you that Lady Davenport looks dreadfully ill to-night?"

"Yes, I have been thinking so all the evening."

"Can anything have happened? any fresh anxiety?"

"Not that I know of. But her constant anxiety tells upon her, and she is unused to the fatigue of a large party in the house."

"We are to move to London very soon now," said Catherine.
 "Then I hope she will be better."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE following morning Miss Johnstone received a letter written in a strange, flourishing hand, bearing the London post-mark. Its contents, which ran as follows, perplexed and distressed her greatly,

"MADAM,—You denied to me the other day that you was going to marry Mr. Roger Davenport, but common Rumor says it is true, and I believe you was the party as paid up the thirteen hundred pounds for him. Weather or not, it is right that you should know what his charakter is, and I am acting as a frend in telling you. I don't care who knows that I say it—he is no gentleman: he is no better than a common thief: his behavior to me justifies me not sparing him. You ask him what he was doing with her Ladyship's sapphires and diamonds yesterday—and see what he says. He tried to sell them to my partner, Mr. Israels, and get false stones put in their place. The reason he did not sucsede was from no fault of his. He stole them—that is what he did; and if you doubt my word, you ask her Ladyship.

"Yours to command,

"JOSIAH BARTON."

Catherine read this with a glow of indignation and disgust at the writer's outrageous accusation, no less than at his insolent familiarity. It carried its own falsity on its face. It was a monstrous slander, concocted by this infamous Jew out of spite for something Roger had done. It was disgraceful. What! steal his mother's jewels? The idea was too preposterous. Then she reread the letter in a more judicial temper; and for the first time a horrible doubt as to whether so direct and open a charge could be made without some ground forced itself upon her. What should she do? Should she do anything? After all, the refutation of such a charge—the rehabilitation of Roger Davenport's character—no longer concerned her, directly, as it might have done a few days since. But was it just to allow such a slander to remain unrefuted? To let it prejudice her mind, as it could not fail to do, unless proved to be false, without satisfying herself on this point? And yet to drop any hint of such a character to Sir Norman or Lady Davenport, as the writer suggested, would be a direct insult. Still less could she speak to Roger, after what had passed between them. She was ignorant of his exact position toward these Jews, but it was clear that certain transactions had led to this letter; and to show it to him might be dangerous. There was but one person to whom she could apply,

without risk, who might devise means of rebutting this libel. She hesitated; for Philip Holroyd's dislike to his former pupil was unconcealed; but on second thoughts she cast her hesitation aside as unworthy. He was too upright and just, she was convinced, to allow any personal feeling to influence his action or his decision in such a matter.

But it so chanced that the day passed without her having an opportunity of speaking to him alone. He disappeared with Malcolm after luncheon, and neither then nor at dinner was she near him. Thane sat next to her again; and indeed scarcely left her all the afternoon, during a long walk, in which all the younger members of the party joined. Catherine would willingly have dispensed with this assiduity, though she really found him pleasant, in spite of his absurdities: but as no one came to her rescue—Roger studiously avoided her, and all the other young men held aloof—she had no choice but to submit. When, however, he wanted her to engage herself to him for several dances during the evening, she was equal to the occasion.

"The first square? Yes; if you like it, and one waltz later on? Yes, which shall it be? But I can't dance with you all night, you know—it would be monotonous for both of us. I am a savage, remember, just caught, and I want to see the world. Now, I might just as well pass the evening at home here as drive five miles to C——, if I am to dance only with you."

He replied in the same bantering tone, but he had the good taste to desist from pressing her further. His opinion of the young woman was decidedly raised. As he expressed himself to a friend, "One has to do all one knows to keep up with her. She is deuced sharp. Life wouldn't be as dull as it is if all the girls one had to talk to were like her."

The whole of the Davenport party went to the ball; an omnibus and two carriages full. How willingly would poor Lady Davenport have remained behind—she felt so little capable of wearing her mask, and hiding the aching anxiety at her heart before the whole county. It was bad enough at home, but abroad the trial was doubly severe. Had she known the truth—had she known that the tiara and necklace she fastened with such care were but of glass, and that the substitution had been effected by her husband months ago when she believed the jewels to be at the bank—she would never have shown her face in society again. Catherine had observed with concern the increased pallor and look of weariness on her face during dinner. When it was over, she whispered,

"I am sure you are very tired. Don't go to the ball on my account, please. Lady Retford will chaperone me, and—"

"It is not Lady Retford's duty, and it is mine, my dear. Besides, Sir Norman would be annoyed if I did not go."

"As to its being a duty toward me, dear Lady Davenport, surely if I don't wish you to perform it—"

"No, my dear, I have undertaken to introduce you. If I shirk doing so on the first really public occasion that presents itself, I am not fit for the post."

"She is fit for any post, even in heaven," said Catherine to herself, as she went upstairs to put on her cloak. She felt certain that

some severe sorrow had been added to the weight this admirable woman bore with such heroic fortitude. Could it be concerned in any way with the monstrous libel against Roger contained in that vile letter?

The assembly-rooms at C——, now some eighty years old, are as meager and dingy as such saloons devoted to festivity usually are in England. While the smallest German Bath can afford a "Kur-saal" of stately dimensions, freshly, if not always tastefully, decorated, there is scarcely a town in England, if we except the great commercial strongholds of wealth, and one or two watering-places, that is better off than C—— in this respect. Even the metropolis is niggardly in the accommodation it provides for public entertainments, the old drab-colored haunts of fashion in St. James's, consecrated by the "prestige" of Almacks, and the dirt of several generations of dancers, being nearly all it has to offer.

As Catherine entered the room with Lady Davenport, a quadrille was being formed, and Thane, who had preceded them in the omnibus, at once led his partner to her place opposite the Duchess of Deal, who had engaged him as her *vis-à-vis*.

On the hard moreen benches at the upper end of the room sat the great ladies of the county—not all together; far from it. On one side the Whigs (we never call them Liberals in C——shire), with the Davenports and the county member's family. On the other, the Tory faction, headed by that imperious politician, Lady Longridge, whose virulent abuse of Mr. Gladstone it was thought would make the great leader quail in his shoes, could he hear her, with the Duchess of Deal, and Mrs. Courtland, and a large gathering of "smart" people from London. This was unquestionably the younger, livelier, and more attractive section; that upon the opposite side being—with the exception of the Davenport party—representative only of a solid and aggressive respectability. Of course the two rival factions interchanged civilities—paid each other visits—danced with each others' daughters, and even coalesced upon the neutral ground of a central bench, with apparent cordiality; but they all held to their own fastnesses.

The duchess said to Catherine, with a beaming smile during the quadrille, as they stood for an instant together,

"Come and sit by me, Miss Johnstone, when this is over. I want to fix a time for you to come and stay at Barrencourt."

"Shall you go?" asked Thane, who heard this.

"Probably not. We move to London very soon."

"I almost vowed that I'd never go to Barrencourt again, for they put me into a north room the last time I was there; but if you'll go, I'll tell the duchess that I'll come."

"That is an irresistible attraction, of course," returned Catherine, demurely. "Still, I should like to be sure of it before I accept. The Castle might be full, you know."

He did not mind her chaff, and replied, laughing, that he was pretty sure there would be room for him. She felt encouraged to continue.

"I do so want to know, Captain Thane, why you shouldn't have a north room as well as any one else?"

"Because I don't like it. If a fellah don't mind it, he's quite right to go."

"I thought you had been through the Zulu War?"

"So I have. What then?"

"And do you mean to say you won't join a pleasant party, for fear of being put into a north room?"

"On the contrary, I say I *will* join a pleasant party. If there's anything to be gained by it, I'll sleep on the bare ground, not otherwise."

"What a sordid view of society!" cried Catherine, gayly. "Do you always calculate the probable loss and gain before you accept an invitation?"

"It's as well to do so before one goes to Barrencourt. The duchess plays high points, and their cook is awfully bad, you know. I'm not going to encounter the dangers of that north-west passage at the Castle in January again, unless I've some strong attraction."

"Ah, I see; you want a bill of fare, to know who is to be your *pièce de résistance*, and whether your side-dishes will be to your taste, before you go. I'm glad my appetite is not so pampered, Captain Thane. I can take my chance of sitting next to any ordinary man, like yourself, day after day, without expecting any attraction!" Thus she chaffed him, and he laughed good-humoredly in return, throughout the quadrille. When it was over,

"I am not going to sit by the duchess," she said. "Lady Davenport is alone. I'll go to her."

But on their way they passed near Holroyd, who stood talking upon foreign politics with the county member. Catherine stopped deliberately.

"I want to speak to you, Mr. Holroyd. Will you take me to tea during the next square dance?"

He bowed and she passed on; but Charley Thane was more put out by this than he had been by her quiet ridicule.

"Deuced bad form," he said to himself, "asking a fellah like that to take her to tea! One'll have to cure her of that sort of thing."

A succession of people came up and spoke to Lady Davenport, and she introduced them to Catherine. Her engagement-card was soon filled up; but she kept two consecutive dances free for her conversation with Philip. Mrs. Hare sat on the other side of her, and the running fire of her comments on those who passed was characteristic.

"How well Mrs. Courtland looks to-night!"—this in her most silvery voice. "Rather like a Nautch girl, perhaps, with all that gold embroidery, and sequins, and bangles—but no, I see, she is not undressed for dancing—those flowing draperies would fall if she moved rapidly. She is more like a cheap print of 'The Light of the Harem,' or what I suppose they call in Eastern lands 'a lump of delight' for the Sultan. She pretends to be listening to Lord Barrencourt, but she has hardly taken her eyes off Roger Davenport since she came into the room—*et lui, il recule, pour mieux sauter*."

"Who is that very pretty girl in pink?" asked Catherine, abruptly, by way of changing the subject of her companion's observation.

"That? That, I am told, is an attorney's daughter from the town

here. Her eyes are like the first star in the evening—she ought to inspire that young poet, Mr. Frail, with a sonnet—(the fat, unwholesome-looking man who is talking to Malcolm). She would have done so three hundred years ago; but the romance of love at first sight, or of a hopeless life-long attachment, like Petrarch's for Laura, is a thing of the past. What has Mr. Frail written, did you ask? A good deal of fleshy poetry, pink and white, without much muscle, but extraordinarily supple—what may be called acrobatic verse, ingenious in its convolutions and distortions, but devoid of any real thought or heart. He is an epitome of the young poetry of the nineteenth century, cleverness instead of genius, sensuality instead of passion, vanity and self-glorification instead of the devotion to and glorification of another."

"Perhaps he has never yet been in love," laughed Catherine. "You can't expect a man to write about what he hasn't felt."

"No, that is just it. Men of the stamp of Mr. Frail are incapable of it. They play at it, they will versify about their lacerated feelings; they will write and receive letters from women, which they will show about to their friends; they will weep and tear their hair; but of deep, manly, silent absorption of their own being in that of another they have not an idea! Such creatures can't write about what they have never felt. You are right!"

As was so often the case with Mrs. Hare, beginning with satire, she had worked herself up into making a protest, more passionate in its indignation than the subject or the occasion warranted.

"Well, as I never read poetry, I am sure I don't care. I don't suppose it makes much difference to any one what he writes. Oh! there is a waltz beginning, and I am engaged to Lord Barrencourt. By the bye, I have just been asked to stay there. Shall I go or not; what do you say?"

"It depends, my dear"—Mrs. Hare's voice was again soft and low—"it depends on what you want—on what you expect to get."

"Good gracious! you are like Captain Thane. What could I expect to get except a little diversion? It is very good-natured of the duchess to ask me—but I scarcely know her."

"It is not at all good-natured, my dear. You are too honest to fall into that conventional cant. She would not ask you if she did not want you. She has her own very good reasons for doing so. As to diversion, you are not the sort of girl who will encourage a man and then throw him over—though I am told you have refused three men within the last three days."

"It is not true—" but before she could say any more Lord Barrencourt stood before her, stammering—

"I think—this is—our—"

She took his arm, and in another minute was whirling round the room.

CHAPTER XX.

CATHERINE sat in the tea-room, which was nearly empty, and beside her was Philip Holroyd.

"I want to consult you again," she began. "It seems as if I were always consulting you! But we both wish to spare poor Lady

Davenport pain, if possible, and you are the only person who can help me in a matter which would distress her beyond measure if it came to her ears. Read that"—she drew out the letter and gave it to him. "Of course I don't believe a word of the accusation it contains. The man who wrote it must be a scoundrel. But that is not enough. It ought to be disproved. What can I do?"

He read Barton's letter twice from end to end with a knit brow. Then, when he had folded it up slowly, he held it in his hand for a minute, looking at the blank wall before him, as if the course to be pursued were written there, but that he was resolved to make no mistake about it.

"I think you had better do nothing," he said at last.

"Why do you say so?"

"You have only been here a few weeks, and your position is a peculiar one. You had better not mix yourself up in the family affairs—they are muddy waters. If you contemplated—even remotely—marrying Roger Davenport—"

"That I distinctly do not," she interrupted.

"Then it would be different. As it is, you had far better dismiss the subject of this letter from your mind. It was written in revenge, no doubt, under the impression that it would inflict the most serious injury on Roger by damaging him in your eyes."

"I should certainly never allow it to do that," she said, more decidedly than perhaps some secret and involuntary doubts justified.

"Still I think it shameful to allow such a charge as this to remain unrefuted. This wretch may have written other similar letters. Mr. Davenport's character may be whispered away behind his back, without his being allowed an opportunity of proving his innocence!"

"And what if he can not prove it?" Holroyd looked at her steadily in the face as he said this.

"Mr. Holroyd! it is impossible. You can not mean—you can not believe—"

"I do not say I believe, or disbelieve, Miss Johnstone. That has nothing to do with it. What I ask you to consider is, first, how you are going to proceed in order that Roger may clear his character? Secondly, whether your position will not be most painful supposing he is unable to do so completely? There may be some substratum of truth in this, which it would greatly distress the family should it become known to you. You had better remain as ignorant as you can of all the skeletons in their cupboards."

"I am sure I don't want to know them. I don't want to appear in this matter at all, it would be very disagreeable. But I feel that it would be disloyal to Lady Davenport to let her son be traduced thus, and to make no effort to clear his character. You could do this, if you chose, Mr. Holroyd, without compromising me in the inquiry."

"What is it you wish me to do? To speak to Roger? I think it very likely he will not answer me, or he will resent the inquiry. My position as regards him is singular; for he knows my opinion of him, and yet I have been the ostensible means of his delivery from this Jew's clutches. And now you want me to render him another service, if it be possible? Well! I will do it, because you ask me. But I am afraid you are mistaken. I believe it would be

better to burn this letter, and try to forget it. If Roger indignantly rebuts the charge, or if he declines to say anything, I am equally driven to apply to this Barton, and he will, of course, reiterate his accusation. He is a man whom you—very rightly—say you do not choose to believe, but what will you have gained? How will Roger's character be re-established?"

Catherine took him up quickly.

"You argue upon the assumption that Mr. Davenport will not be able to prove the entire falsity of this story. I have no doubt he will be able to do so, to my satisfaction, and, I hope, to yours."

"If that is meant as an insinuation, you know it to be unjust—or you would not ask me to meddle in this matter. I have no love for Roger; but for his mother's sake I would give a great deal to be able to prove him innocent."

"I am sure you would. I did not mean to insinuate anything, except that your masculine mind might not accept an explanation as readily as mine would."

"That I think very possible," he said, with a momentary smile. He added gravely; "I feel that you have a right to know the truth, if it can be learned, because you have befriended Roger as certainly no one else would have done; and you want to do so still further by recommending him to Mr. Grogan. Therefore, though I still think it would be wiser for you not to mix yourself up in his affairs, I will do my best to learn the truth, and I shall report to you faithfully the result of my interview with him."

Their conversation was interrupted here by the entrance of Roger himself, accompanied by Mrs. Courtland; and as Catherine had had no opportunity as yet of speaking to the pretty, foolish creature, she rose and advanced toward her.

"Oh! I am so glad!" cried Mrs. Courtland, leaving Roger's arm and clasping Catherine's hand in both of her own, "I wanted so much to go and sit by you in the ball-room, but"—here she dropped her voice—"I hadn't the courage to face Lady Davenport. Do you know she almost cut me when I passed her?"

"I shall go and sit by you then, presently," said Catherine. "Only don't be too long over your tea, please, because, after the next dance, I am engaged all the evening."

This was a bold interference with Roger, who had certainly meant to remain in the tea-room the best part of an hour. And it was running openly and directly counter to Lady Davenport's wishes that she should thus parade her intimacy with Mrs. Courtland by crossing the room to sit beside her. But Catherine had rapidly weighed the pros and cons in this case. She was acting with her eyes wide open; at least, she thought so.

"What have you got to do with that girl?" asked Roger sharply, as soon as Catherine and her companion were out of ear-shot. "What earthly good can it do you to pretend to be so affectionate with her?"

"I don't pretend. I like her very, very much. If there were more women like her, I don't think I should hate my own sex as I do."

Roger laughed. "Let us thank—shall I say the devil?—there are not. Great, big, coarse creatures like that with wills of their own,

and opinions, and all the rest of it—they're not the sort of women for me."

"No—that's why she refused you." Mrs. Courtland darted a sharp look at the imperturbable ivory mask close to her. "It is no use your denying it—I know you proposed."

"And if I did? What drove me to it? Desperation! You don't suppose if it wasn't for her money, that I should look at such a girl twice, do you?"

"I think she is a grèat deal too good for you, and that you would have been only too lucky if she had accepted you."

We are not concerned to dwell upon the rest of their conversation, which lasted some ten minutes longer. Any close observer, watching those faces, would have guessed pretty nearly the relative position of the two: the complete subjugation of the woman in spite of the struggle to be free; the pitiless determination of the hunter not to allow the prey he had brought down, and which he now held within his grasp, to escape him. Her color came and went; her eye shifted uneasily, and was rarely raised to his; she spoke but little, and what she said was uttered in that sharp and almost irritable tone, which was as a feeble protest against the fascination he exercised over her. It was in vain that she tried to resist the influence of his voice—the voice that was dropping poison into her ear.

At last she broke away, crying in a tremulous voice,

"I will listen to you no more. I will go back to the ball-room." She was some yards from him before he could overtake her. He had no choice but to give her his arm, for he saw that several people were watching him. She looked very pale as she sat down on the bench near the duchess. A minute later Catherine joined her.

The substance of what passed between them, together with Catherine's impressions thereon, will be given in her own words presently. At this moment we are more concerned to follow Roger.

He looked round the room, and met the upward glance of two or three bright young faces eager for a dance. But he was in no mood to exert himself to be agreeable just now without a definite object in view. His temper was ruffled; he would soothe it by a cigar down-stairs. Holroyd, who was watching him, followed Roger from the ball-room and into the smoking-room below. It was empty.

"I wished for a few minutes' conversation with you uninterrupted," began Philip, "and we may perhaps have it here."

"Perhaps," echoed Roger languidly, as he drew out his cigar-case, and offered it to Holroyd.

But the other shook his head. He stood erect, his eye fixed on Roger; who, for his part, threw himself into an easy-chair, crossed his legs, and looked into the fire, at his faultless boots, at the end of his cigar, anywhere but at the penetrating eyes that were bent on him.

"I am going to ask you one or two questions," said Holroyd, "and you will answer them, or not, as you please. But I wish you to understand that my sole object in doing this is to try and clear your character of a charge which, if it be allowed to circulate unchallenged, will do you an amount of injury that a whole life-time will not wipe out. I am quite willing to believe, indeed I feel certain, that this accusation would not have been made, if you had not

incurred the deadly enmity of one of those Jews whom I saw the other day about your affairs."

Roger looked up for an instant. Quick as lightning he guessed, if not the exact truth, at least the main fact, that information of yesterday's transaction had reached Holroyd's—his chief enemy's—ears.

"I kicked Barton into the street yesterday," he said, without a moment's hesitation. "Now then, what does he accuse me of?"

"He says that you abstracted the family jewels yesterday, and brought them to him, wishing him to substitute false ones in their place."

"You see them on my mother to-night. Is not that sufficient refutation of the lie?"

"Hardly. He insinuates that he would not be a party to the transaction. At least he says that it was 'no fault' of yours that it did not come off."

Roger affected impatience. "Do you mean to believe the word of a damned scoundrel like Barton against mine?"

"You have not yet denied that you took the jewels to him."

Roger winced visibly this time; his color betrayed him.

"I do not deny it. I did take them to him, to be valued—only to be valued."

"May I ask with what object—as they can not legally be sold?"

"You had better ask my father what arrangement he proposed to make with his cousins. Heir looms can't go on forever, you know."

"Am I to understand, then, that it was with Sir Norman's knowledge that you took the jewels up yesterday?" asked Philip, half incredulous and half indignant. If this was, indeed, a plot concocted between father and son, he saw at once that it might be made to wear the aspect of a plausible transaction. But how about Lady Davenport? That she was privy to it he would never believe.

"I really do not see what business it is of yours," said Roger, with quiet insolence; "but as you insist on interfering in our family affairs, you had better ask him what is the estimated value of the jewels. You can say that I desired you to ask him."

An evil smile played about the young man's mouth. Holroyd was baffled; there was something here which escaped even his acuteness. To extract the truth, or anything approaching to the truth, from Roger, he saw was hopeless. And since the introduction of a new element into this mystery, his further insistence was useless, even if it could be held to be justifiable.

"I have no intention of speaking to Sir Norman on the subject. He would have a perfect right to talk of my 'interfering in his family affairs.' You have not, because, I told you, at starting, that my only object in asking you these questions was to try and clear you of a serious charge. Unfortunately, your replies do not help me to do so, but from the moment your father's name is mixed up in the affair, my lips are sealed. It rests with him to clear your character."

"It is not likely to suffer from the lies an infernal Jew tells—except with those who wish to believe the worst of me."

"Your mother is not of that number, but I trust the story may not reach her ear, all the same."

Roger was silent for a few moments. He felt sure that Barton

would not write the truth to his mother. What would he gain by so doing? Having discharged his venom in communicating with Holroyd, it was the man's interest to be silent now. A lawsuit might damage him in many ulterior ways, besides the very possible direct injury of making him disgorge the jewels, which no doubt he had purchased at much below their value. Therefore, he replied,

"I trust not, as she will continue to wear them undisturbed—as long as Sir Norman lives. The affair is at an end, so I hope it will not be named to her."

"I hope not. But though you treat Barton's accusation so lightly, you forget one thing. Unless you, or Sir Norman, take steps to prevent this Jew's circulating his version of the transaction, no one will believe in your entire innocence. Whoever allowed himself to be traduced and did not give his traducer the lie?"

Roger shrugged his shoulders. "I have given him the lie often enough, and I've kicked him. I'm not going to sue him for libel—it wouldn't suit my book. My father may do what he likes."

"You will remember that though you choose to bring his name into this affair, *you* were the acting party in it; it is *you* who are accused, not Sir Norman, whom Barton does not even mention. However, you must take your own course. Only, I tell you plainly, Roger, if you can't face this like a man, you are lost."

He had rapidly reviewed the situation while Holroyd spoke. He never lacked decision in emergency. He must change his tone; he could no longer afford to be insolent if Holroyd was to be bamboozled, but he would inflict a home-thrust which should teach this meddler to look out for himself.

"Of course you're right, and I'm much obliged to you for speaking. I fancy these lies were invented chiefly for *your* benefit. Perhaps Barton had reason to think you were likely to spread them where they would injure me most. Of course, he was mistaken. But, somehow, I doubt his propagating them any further. He can gain nothing by doing so. If he does, I must see what is to be done. But at present my hands are tied. The secret is not mine; it is an intricate affair, and if I moved in it I might bring about a catastrophe which you would not wish, for it would ruin others, and leave me untouched."

It was the second time he had implied that Philip would rejoice in the confirmation of the story, and the allusion to Catherine conveyed as much annoyance as it was intended to do, but the elder man did not condescend to notice it. He stood there like a judge, resolute, unmoved; and the other, who sat at the bar of his judgment, with a thin sarcastic smile flitting across the handsome mask from time to time, felt that his woven tissue of truth and falsehood only puzzled, it did not deceive the keen intelligence with which he was in contact.

"I have no more to say—you will take our own course."

With these words Philip turned upon his heel and left the room.

On entering the ball-room the first object his eyes sought was Catherine. He saw with displeasure that she was seated between Mrs. Courtland and the duchess. The latter was talking to her with animation, and Catherine did not look bored, or on the defensive, as he would have liked her to have looked. On the contrary, she

seemed well amused. Philip was disappointed. He did not go near her all the evening. What would be the use of it? He could not talk seriously to her in the interval between a polka and a waltz. He held aloof and watched her, but she several times looked round the room for him, and once she caught his eye in the crowd.

Later, as the duchess and her party were about to leave the ball, Philip, who happened to be standing in the doorway in close proximity to Mrs. Latour and her partner in the waltz, heard her say,

"Are you going to Barrencourt? No? Neither am I. If I was very fast I should be asked, perhaps. But they tell me, of course I don't know if it's true, that the duchess is very jealous of my figure. Of course she can't be exclusive, or she wouldn't ask Miss Johnstone. But then every one knows why *she* is asked."

Mrs. Latour was whirled off, and Catherine was brought to an anchor in that harbor of refuge, just as the duchess was passing out.

"I shall expect you then on Friday, at five," he heard her say. "Of course I shall send for you to the station."

Then Thane leaned forward. "I shall come by the same train from London, duchess; you asked me, you know, and I left it open."

"I thought you refused," laughed the duchess. "However, if you will put up with a north room we can take you in."

"I'll bring plenty of rugs and furs," said Thane. Philip heard no more. He turned away, muttering an oath under his breath.

* * * * *

"I talked for a long time to Mrs. Courtland last night. I am almost provoked with myself for being interested in her; it certainly proves that my brief Roger-fever is past. I did not feel the least jealous of his devotion; only a sincere pity for the foolish little woman, who seems to me like some poor moth that must inevitably be singed unless the light that attracts it be removed. How to remove it? That is the question.

"She is unhappy, and she is reckless. Should I be so were I married to a man utterly unsuited to me, and were I as pretty and as much admired as she is? Perhaps so. Mr. Courland is called 'a good sort of man;' carelessly confident—that is, neglectful—of his wife; absorbed in his business; not the sort of husband I should like. And this little woman required one whom she feared a little—one who made her the object of constant and jealous regard; she would have been different then.

"I said to her, in the course of our conversation,

"'If you have any real friendship for Mr. Davenport, you will urge his going abroad, at once.'

"'Why?' she returned, almost fiercely. 'He is one of my few friends. Why should I deprive myself of the pleasure of seeing him whenever I can?'

"'Because it is bad for him—and, perhaps, for you too. Employment may be found for him abroad; it is the only door to escape out of his difficulties. Don't shut that door, by encouraging him to remain on here in idleness.'

"'I'm sure I don't want him to remain, if he wishes to go,' she

said with her little petulant air. 'Immediately I like any one, I am told I ought to drive him away—it's absurd!'

"She bore my jobation, however, on the whole very well; she even thanked me, with something very like a tear in her eye—though, the next minute she laughed at the idea of a girl—and an utter barbarian, moreover, as I am—lecturing her, a married woman of eight years' standing. I said—'Never mind: the senses of savage tribes are often keener than those of civilized people. They scent danger from afar. They can hear and see, where the white man, whose organs have been dulled by city-life, remains deaf and blind.'

"After this, the duchess, who had been dancing, came and sat beside me. She seemed to think I had crossed the room to be near her; but it was not so, and I undeceived her. She did not resent my frankness; but was very kind, and really made herself most amusing. She is a clever woman: rather hard, rather audacious, I should say; but with plenty of brains, plenty of observation, and knowledge of politics, the money-market, and the race-course. I should think she never opened a book (except a betting-book); but her remarks showed her to be a spirited student of men and women.

"She pressed me so much to go to Barrencourt on Friday, that I consented. I half regret it now. I am sorry to leave Lady Davenport alone; for everybody goes away either to-day or to-morrow. But, after all, I believe she prefers solitude: and her troubles are not of a nature that can be *talked away*. And then she has Mr. Holroyd, who must be the best friend I think any woman in her position ever had. It is most extraordinary the change in my opinion of him. When I think of how I regarded him, and how I regarded Roger Davenport, three weeks ago, the revolution in all my sentiments makes me feel as if I must have been bewitched then—or that I am bewitched now. But no—I will not admit the second alternative. The captivation of rare beauty, melodious voice, subtle flattery, from under a soft auburn mustache, falling on foolish ears—these may be called 'witchery.' But my judgment deliberately confirms the growing regard I feel for this strong, stern man, against whom, during the first weeks of my stay here, I had such a vehement repulsion. He has never sought to attract me; on the contrary, he has held aloof; an attitude which I resented for some time. I do so no longer; I honor him for it; it is I who sought him out, in spite of my aversion, because he was the only person who could help me in that affair of Roger Davenport's. And now, I feel more pleased by a few rare words, showing that he takes some interest in me—even if it be in condemnation—than I do by the compliments of a Mountjoy or a Thane.

"Why is this? When I look back a few days, and see how the scales fell from my eyes, as it were, with respect to R. D., I ask myself whether I am not an imposition—a poor sentimental creature, the victim of delusions, instead of the sensible matter-of-fact young woman I am credited with being. I will have no more delusions; but, as regards Mr. Holroyd's character—its strength and courage and fearless candor—I can not be deceived. Weakness is the one unpardonable crime in a man; and Roger, I see now, is miserably weak. I should have cared little for his evil-doing, had he shown any energy to try and struggle out of the mire into which

he has fallen. But his ignoble readiness to be *helped out* without making an effort for himself completely disenchanted me. How different to this other man's career! Who, having committed plenty of follies in his early manhood, as I am told, resolved to redeem his past, and, being almost ruined, supported his mother and himself by hard work, and has now achieved a comfortable independence. The woman to whom such a man as this shall devote his life may not be *happy*—for that depends upon a variety of incalculable causes—but at least she will always feel proud of having inspired such attachment.

“But that woman will never be one who is largely endowed. I feel confident that his pride would rise in revolt against it.”

CHAPTER XXI.

MANY of the guests departed the following day, Mrs. Hare among the rest.

“So you are going to Barrencourt after all?” she said as she parted from Catherine. “Perhaps you are wise. After a few days there, you will be able to tell whether you care to buy strawberry-leaves at such a price. I would not myself—but then I am called romantic. And then you have everything else this world can give, besides some things it can't. When I saw you revolving round the room with that young man last night, do you know what I did? I scratched with a pencil on the back of my fan this distich:—

“To one who feels hearts are not to be bought,
Life without Love would be a Barren-court.”

Miserable as they are, I advise you to bear those two lines in mind. Good-by. I hope we shall soon meet in London.”

Mrs. Latour and Thane also left Davenport that day; but one or two girls and some of the younger men remained, and with them Roger. They were all to go up to London together the following morning; Roger, as he informed his mother, “to see after his affairs.” She had a long conversation with him, but could obtain no definite information as to his plans. He should probably go abroad soon—it would depend. He might even start before the family moved up to London, where Sir Norman had taken a house from the beginning of the Parliamentary Session, now only a fortnight distant.

No one knew where he went that afternoon. He disappeared after luncheon, and neither the tennis-players, nor those who walked, enjoyed the benefit of his society. Among the latter were Catherine and Lady Davenport, with Malcolm and Holroyd.

It was a perfectly still mild winter's day—such a day as is almost unknown out of England. Across the Channel there would be a crispness in the air, which is absent on such days with us. Further south there would be golden light and cold blue shadow; here there is neither strong light nor shadow. A tender mist reigns over all, the smoke from the cottages yonder has hardly strength to curl upward through the soft damp air, the dead leaves do not rustle, but lie flat and moist upon the path.

They took their way through a young plantation, up to a high-lying portion of the park, Lady Davenport and Catherine leading the way. Walking parties are often tantalizing, the wrong couples falling together, by accident at first, and never finding the opportunity to "sort" themselves, perhaps, until it be too late. It was so on this occasion. The fates willed it that Philip, who was most anxious to tell Catherine, as he had promised to do, the result of his interview with Roger on the previous night (of which, however, she was unaware), was seized upon in the hall, as they were starting, by an intelligent girl desirous of putting a question in classical history to the tutor, who would, she felt sure, be kind enough to answer it. He wished her—further, as he saw Catherine walk on ahead with Lady Davenport, and found himself compelled to be this young lady's companion for the next half hour or more.

Lady Davenport, who was accustomed to walk a great deal, had scarcely been out of the house for two days. She was more pale and worn than ever this afternoon; and Catherine, looking into her face, felt a desire to say something which should send a ray of hope into the darkened chambers of the mother's heart.

"How glad you must be that all the gayety is over, and that the house will be quiet again to-morrow!" she began. "Even I am going to leave you at peace for a few days."

"I shall not be sorry to be quiet."

"Mr. Davenport is going away to-morrow also, is he not?"

"Yes. He goes up to London."

"And he thinks of going abroad shortly?"

"I—I believe so. He has no settled plan, I think."

"Would you not like him to have a settled plan? Would you not like him to have some employment abroad?"

"Ah! I should indeed—but I am afraid that is hopeless."

"Do you think he would go to Melbourne, and look after some affairs of mine out there? I would constitute him my agent for a time. He would not have a great deal to do, and my father's successor in business, Mr. Grogan, would put him in the way of doing what has to be done."

Lady Davenport's face had grown, if possible, a shade paler; and then a faint color rose to her cheek, as she said, quickly:

"My son is not a good business man, unfortunately. I feel deeply your kindness. You would *make* a post in order to help him; but he is quite unfit for any—any position of that kind—any position of responsibility; poor boy! I should dread it for him."

There was an expression of such acute anguish on her face, as she said these words, that Catherine felt awed. She remembered Philip's counsel, and regretted now that she had spoken.

A minute or two later, Lady Davenport resumed, with more of her usual restraint:

"You have seen enough of my son now, I think, Miss Johnstone, to know that he has not yet learned the necessity of sacrificing his inclinations, whatever they may be, to any sense of obligation. God grant that he may learn to do so in the course of years! At present, I can not desire that he should undertake duties that are connected with *business*—in any way. Do not propose it to him. I hope he may be persuaded to enter some foreign service—or we might per-

haps get him a commission in a West Indian regiment, if he would take it."

"Mr. Holroyd was in a foreign service, was he not?" said Catherine, glad of an opportunity to divert the conversation into another channel; "and I believe he liked it very much."

"Yes, he was in an Austrian cavalry regiment for some years, and did very well, as he was sure to do, whatever career he had adopted."

"You have a very high opinion of him, I believe?"

"I have, indeed; and not without reason. He is reserved, and difficult to know; has too much pride, and is too careless of the good opinion of people in general, to be popular. But you will find him worth cultivating, Miss Johnstone. Under that rather repelling manner is a very rare nature—so absolutely noble, and free from smallness of any kind."

"I am sure of it."

"Indeed? I fancied, as you so seldom speak, that you disliked him; and, to say the truth, I could not wonder at it, for he takes so little pains to be agreeable. It is his only fault—but I admit that it is a great one."

"I suspect," said Catherine, smiling, "it is a fault that the few to whom such culprits do condescend to talk find it easy to forgive."

"No," observed the just Lady Davenport, desirous to exhibit no undue leniency to her friend, "it is a great fault; it belongs partly to a misplaced pride, partly to indifference. No one—especially a man who possesses such conversational power—has a right to abstract himself in general society. When we are alone here, he will talk the whole evening long."

"I am sorry now I am going to Barrencourt on Friday. However, when I return, I hope to hear some of this brilliant conversation," laughed Catherine.

Lady Davenport said nothing. She was thinking of Roger's insinuation as to Holroyd, which she knew to be not only baseless, but diametrically opposed to his character, as well as to his bearing toward Catherine. She wished that he would open out more to the young heiress, in whom she felt now a really strong interest, and to whom a wise man's counsel might be so valuable. But she knew so well why he had shrunk from any approach to intimacy with the girl; and the barrier would, she feared, prove impassable.

When they had reached the brow of the upland, from which the far faint line of the sea was distinguishable on the horizon in clear weather, but only to the eye of faith on a day like this, Lady Davenport halted, and allowed the rest of the party to come up with them. It was a pretty enough view in its way; the soft indefinite lines lost in each other; the gray-green fields beyond the belt of brown woods, with here a farmstead, here a winding reach of river, that reflected the primrose-colored sky of the pale winter sunset. There was no salient feature, no strong contrast, or "dominant chords of tone," as Malcolm said. He called it "a prelude in a minor key;" whereat the intelligent young woman smiled, and asked, for information, what it was a prelude to.

"The night is coming on—the sea is in the distance—the spring is

at hand—don't you understand? It is a landscape of expectancy. Nothing complete, or mature. The darkness will swallow it all, and then the morning will burst with a triumphal hymn, and the spring will awaken and clothe these dead woods with green, and the sun will sparkle on the distant sea—all that is the accomplished symphony. That is why I called this the prelude."

The intelligent young woman looked a little dazed. Philip meantime had approached Catherine; and Lady Davenport, pleased to see so unusual an advance on his part (as it appeared to her), left them together, and joined some other member of the party. As soon as she was out of hearing,

"Have you spoken to Mr. Davenport?" asked Catherine.

"I did so last night. He does not deny the actual *fact*, but he tries to explain it away. He wishes to make it appear that some arrangement with the collateral heirs was contemplated, by which these heirlooms might be sold. He drags another name into all this, which I shall not repeat to you; but the fact remains, which he does not dispute, that he took the jewels from his mother's keeping, without her knowledge—'to have them valued,' as he says."

"But—but, if it is only that, he can prove it? He can prevent this horrid Jew from circulating this vile story?"

"He adduces no proof as to the truth of *his* version of it, and it is clear that he is going to do nothing as regards the Jew. He kicked him down-stairs, it seems, and he says this letter was written in the man's rage. He feels sure that Barton will not follow it up by any others. I have stated as fully as I can his explanation. He talked about its being 'an intricate affair,' and that it was not his secret; and he brought in, as I have said, the name of another person; and in this manner he stopped my mouth. I could ask no more. It is not satisfactory to me; it is not consistent with innocence, in my opinion—this shrinking from investigation, and from challenging the truth of such a damaging charge. Do you think it is?"

The girl's frank face was clouded: "I am afraid not. I can not bear to think it. I can't fancy any man behaving so. Poor Lady Davenport! Oh! how I feel for her! How I feel for any woman who loves him! Surely life can have no trial so bitter as this—to find that what one loved is despicable? I hope—oh! I do *hope*—she won't know it! Poor Lady Davenport."

"Between ourselves, I think she already does. It would account for her looking so very ill ever since last Monday night. She has borne up against everything hitherto, but this has fairly crushed her."

"I can hardly realize it now. Perhaps, after all, it is not as bad as it appears. It seems incredible. It sounds like a story in a 'penny dreadful.' What is to become of him—wretched young man!"

"I am sure I don't know. You may pay a man's debts and set him on his legs, but if he can't stand upright, if he falls into the mire at every step, what are you to do? Upon my word, I believe the kindest thing would be to lock him up as a lunatic. He could do no harm to himself or any one else in a *maison de santé*, where he was kindly treated. You see now that it would not be justifiable to recommend him to Mr. Grogan for any position of trust."

"No. I thought over it since I spoke to you the other day, and I had resolved to try and find employment for him myself which should involve no risk to any one else. I have house property in Melbourne which my lawyers here seem to think is mismanaged. Mr. Grogan has too much to do to look after it, and it struck me that if Mr. Davenport would consent to go out for me I might send him. But I broached the subject to Lady Davenport just now, and she begged me not to name it to him. It seemed to distress her; and no wonder! if your surmise be right. At any rate, all idea of this must be at an end now."

"Ay, it must, indeed. What you tell me confirms my impression—Lady Davenport would gratefully have entertained this idea of yours a few days since. Now I feel sure nothing would induce her to encourage it. I am glad he goes to-morrow. His presence here can be no comfort to her since this discovery."

"And Sir Norman—do you think he knows? How will he feel?"

"I can't say," was Holroyd's laconic reply.

There was a pause. Then Catherine said,

"I am going away on Friday."

"I know it—and I am sorry. If you were my sister you should not go to Barrencourt."

"Why not? I believe I ought to feel very much flattered at being invited."

"It is not my idea of flattery; however, let that pass. This is 'why not': Because, if I could help it, my sister should never stay in a house where the moral and intellectual standard was low—no matter whether it were a duke's or a *parvenu's*. No one can be the better for much intercourse with a woman like the Duchess of Deal."

"It is all new to me; I dare say I sha'n't be amused, but it is a fresh experience. And you don't really fancy that I shall be demoralized by being under the roof of a fast duchess for a few days?"

"What good can such 'fresh experience' do you? Knowledge of this kind comes soon enough, and the longer a woman can keep away from it the better. The mind gets very quickly accustomed to what it sees round it. Mrs. Courtland startled you at first, I think? You have reached the stage of pitying her, of making allowances. Habit has easy stepping-stones over almost any stream, and one can't say where it may land one."

"I don't see why pitying or making allowances should necessarily land one upon toleration of what one knows to be wrong. I am not a child. I am two-and-twenty, Mr. Holroyd. If I have a grain of sense, I am of an age to distinguish good from evil. I have a curiosity to see as much as I can of this new world, to which I am a stranger. Is it unnatural? Is it wrong? Surely there are plenty of women much better than I am who belong to that world, and are uncorrupted?"

"Certainly there are. But when you voluntarily go out of your own sphere, let it be for the sake of what is elevated—in some higher sense than that of fashion. In coming to this house you were fortunate in making a friend of such a woman as Lady Davenport. But

there are not many like her to be found anywhere; and the intimacies you have formed outside this house, I should disapprove—if you were my sister.”

“You are very stern, but I don’t mind it as regards myself. Only the poor little woman you are too severe upon—”

“I am not severe on any one. My sister should not choose Mrs. Courtland as her friend—that is all.”

“But you would not prevent your sister from holding out a hand to try and help her?”

“What help can a girl give to a woman like that?” he asked almost angrily. Then he added in a calmer tone, “I am a man who must either say pretty plainly what is in my mind, or else hold my peace. I can be silent, as you know; and if my plain-speaking displeases you, tell me so, and I will offend no more.”

“You may speak as plainly as you like. Few people have ever taken enough interest in me to do so, and I feel so grateful for it, that I could never be offended. On the other hand I am obstinate, sometimes. You must forgive me, if I do not always take your advice.”

“What right have I to expect that you should? You have come to me once or twice for help, you have asked my opinion as a man, which is my excuse for speaking to you now as I have done. I hope you will never have reason to regret or to withdraw the confidence you have placed in me.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE result of the foregoing conversation was curious. It induced Catherine to write and excuse herself to the duchess from paying her promised visit to Barrencourt. But on the other hand, perhaps in consequence of yielding to Holroyd on this point, she was more resolute than ever not to give up Mrs. Courtland. She proved satisfactorily to her own mind that it would be disloyal to do so. The poor foolish woman had sought her, and clung to her friendship, as it appeared to Catherine; she would not desert her, even though Philip Holroyd had expressed himself so strongly against the intimacy.

He alone was aware—for she did not attempt to conceal it from him—of the reason why she gave up her visit to Barrencourt. To Lady Davenport she only said that upon reflection she thought she should not enjoy it, without a single person in the house whom she knew well; and Lady Davenport evidently approved her decision. Sir Norman, who was cognizant of all Charley Thane’s movements and motives, laughed gayly at the picture of the gallant guardsman’s discomfiture, when he should discover that he had braved the terrors of the “north-west passage” for nothing.

Every one was gone: the house was silent, save for the sound of Malcolm’s piano, which was being submitted to the torture of the thumb-screw, as it seemed to Catherine, for longer than usual to-day. And in relation to this practicing of his, something was casually dropped by Lady Davenport, in conversation that afternoon, which opened out a number of eventualities to her listener’s mind.

“Yes,” she observed, in reply to something Catherine had said,

"Malcolm has more inclination to study music seriously than anything else. I hope his father will consent to his going to Germany this year, which is what the boy wants. If he will not work for a profession anything is better than his doing nothing," she added with a sigh.

"I thought he was reading to enter one of the universities?"

"He is idle. Mr. Holroyd has done more than any one else with him, but he has no ambition himself in any other than an artistic career. Sir Norman says, and justly, that it is one that demands exceptional talent for distinction; whereas in diplomacy he might do well enough without shining abilities. But the diplomatic career is expensive, and Malcolm has no taste for it. Under these circumstances, I think the best thing for him is to go to Leipzig for a year. We shall then see what he can do."

"Have you consulted Mr. Holroyd? Is he of your opinion?"

"Yes. He says he will never make a classical scholar; and as his bent is so very decided, it is better to let him follow it, for a time at all events. In a German family he will learn the language, which will be useful; and he will not be acquiring extravagant habits, as he might at Oxford. Lady Retford is violently opposed to it; she would like him to do absolutely nothing, I believe; but though he is to be her heir, I cannot think that her opinion ought to influence our decision. Idleness is the worst of all curses."

"Mr. Holroyd then will, of course, no longer remain with your son?"

"Oh, no. He only consented to come here for a time at my earnest desire. It is very kind of him to have remained so long. There are plenty of employments open to him. He was offered a private secretaryship to a man in office the other day, but he declined it, because he would not leave us till Malcolm's future was decided. I only learned it by accident, some time afterward."

Catherine was startled to find how blank the prospect of Davenport without this austere man now seemed to her. She had not much conversation alone with him that day, but in the evening he talked a great deal upon various subjects, when the reduced circle was gathered round the fire, and Sir Norman and his sister were both dozing. He related, at Malcolm's request, a number of weird German tales, of which he seemed to have an inexhaustible store, until Catherine begged him to allow them at least an hour or two's undisturbed rest that night. After this he gave a graphic account of some bear hunts in Russia, where he had been with the Austrian Princes; and then he spoke of the country life they had led in Hungary and Bohemia. Lady Davenport listened, and occasionally asked a question; her thoughts were diverted for the time being from the painful channel in which they constantly flowed. Was it to this end solely that he tried to interest his hearers that evening? Catherine asked herself this question more than once. At last she said,

"I should not have thought you would have liked court life, Mr. Holroyd."

"I was very fond of the princes, otherwise it would have been intolerable. Royalty has sometimes the happy gift of attaching its servants strongly; and, when this is the case, the irksomeness and

restraint of court life are compensated for; under no other circumstances would it be bearable, I think."

"No life would be bearable to you where you did not know that you were of use," said Lady Davenport; "and I believe," she added with a smile, "you would put up with any amount of irksomeness and restraint if you felt that you were so."

The following day Catherine rode over to Brookwood, and found Mrs. Courtland looking very ill. She had caught cold at the ball, and had a troublesome cough, evidently accompanied by a good deal of fever. Moreover, perhaps owing purely to physical causes, she was in such a state of depression, alternating with nervous irritability, that Catherine felt really uneasy about her. She talked wildly about no one caring what became of her—railed at her own sex, and at the world at large—said her life was of no value, and that she was reckless how soon it ended—and then she cried violently. Catherine sat and talked to her for some time. She felt that in this hysterical condition there was no saying what Mrs. Courtland might not be led to do. She ought not to be left, as she was, alone; her husband away, and no wise friend at hand. She was not insensible to the voice of kindness as long as the speaker was present; she listened to Catherine, she even thanked her for her counsel, but the girl knew that it would make no lasting impression. Should she offer to come and stay at Brookwood for a few days? Always more impulsive than prudent, the idea no sooner suggested itself to her mind than she acted upon it, and spoke. Mrs. Courtland hesitated; then she colored, and fell upon Catherine's neck and declared she was her good angel. It was arranged that Catherine and her maid should drive over to Brookwood the next day.

When Catherine made this known on her return to Lady Davenport, that lady looked grave.

"I would far rather, of the two, you had gone to Barrencourt, my dear Miss Johnstone. You know my opinion of Mrs. Courtland. She is not an advantageous friend for you."

"I am sorry to do anything you disapprove, Lady Davenport, but I dare say you will think me crazy when I say that I am going to Brookwood, because I think it a duty to do so. What has my duty to do with Mrs. Courtland? Well, somehow or other, I appear to have an influence over this poor foolish woman. She listens to me. She is ill and lonely—perhaps owing to her own fault; no matter—when one sees any way of helping a fellow-creature, surely one ought not to hesitate? It may be a delusion of mine, but I fancy I can be of some use at Brookwood. I am sure I could be of none at Barrencourt."

Lady Davenport said no more. She had long seen that Catherine was one of those who in all-important decisions would admit no arbiter of conduct but their *own* sense of what was right, as applied to their *own* actions. The code of expediency, the generalities of wisdom in dealings with the world, were useful finger-posts which she was by no means inclined to disregard in the broad common paths of life. But the narrow ways, which to some might seem perilous, she would unhesitatingly follow, if she thought she saw between the brambles and interlacing boughs that they led to some sanctuary of truth.

Philip Holroyd was alone in the library before dinner when Catherine entered. She knew he was always the first to be dressed, and she hurried down that she might say a few words to him before the family assembled. He stood near the high chimney-piece, and the bright light of the fire fell upon her as she advanced toward him. She had stuck some white chrysanthemums in her hair; and her dress was black. It was thus he loved to remember her afterward; not in the bravery of ball attire, but without ornament, without other color than that belonging to her rich-toned skin. He had never seen her so simply dressed before; and perhaps until then he had never thought her positively handsome.

She began at once:

"I am going to Brookwood to-morrow, Mr. Holroyd, to stay a few days. I wanted to tell you this myself, because I shouldn't like you to think that I disregarded your advice without a reason; and I *have* a reason, which seems to me more than sufficient to justify my following my own course. You mustn't be angry. I told you you would find me obstinate sometimes."

"Why should I be angry? I volunteered an opinion: you did not ask for it: and you certainly are not bound to regard it."

"Every one must accept the responsibility of his own actions—don't you think so? Even if I were your sister, you could not take that burden on yourself, had she a conscience whose voice spoke out distinctly. All you said to me the other day was true and wise, I know, and I also know that I am ignorant of the world's ways, and too apt to be guided by impulse and curiosity. But, nevertheless, when that inner voice speaks I must listen to it, though Lady Davenport and you and everybody else should declare that I am a self-willed, foolish young woman."

"In the Church of Rome they talk of '*directing* the conscience,' which I think accurately describes what every one should be careful to do for himself. The instinct of right in one man leaning to abundant mercy may render him weak. Those, like myself, on the other hand, whose nature inclines them to administer and to demand an even-handed justice, too often become stern. I have not escaped that danger, you think? No. What you call 'the inner voice' in all of us needs training and watching—in short, as the Catholics say, '*directing*.'"

"I understand: my impulsive inclinations to do what seems to me right are not to be mistaken for laws, and ought not to be trusted implicitly? Perhaps so; but I can't regard any one else's laws as a bit less fallible; and, until I succeed in modifying my own, I can only follow the old, imperfect direction."

"You have good brains," said Philip, after a moment's pause, with one of his rare smiles; "and brains are a capital corrective to a too credulous generosity. I am not afraid of your being harmed in the way many girls might be by such an intimacy as this; and, as to any injury it may do you in the eyes of the world, you have counted the cost, I suppose, and are indifferent to that."

"I am not indifferent to it: when Lady Retford told me just now that I should ruin all my prospects in life by being known as the friend of Mrs. Courtland, I felt annoyed; but, of course, it did not alter my determination. How could it?"

"When are you coming back?" he asked suddenly.

"That depends. I can't say exactly. If I think I am of use there, I may stay till just before we are to move up to London."

"And soon after that, possibly, my occupation here will be gone. I have been talking to Sir Norman about Malcolm to-day. I think he will consent to send him to Germany in March."

"When shall you go? I hope you are not going to leave London?"

"No, I shall probably find something to do there—write for the press, if no other employment turns up."

"You will be very much missed in this house," said Catherine, in a low voice. And then Sir Norman entered, and dinner was soon afterward announced. Catherine and Philip were not again together alone before she left for Brookwood, the following day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CATHERINE JOHNSTONE was naturally fond of children; but even she was obliged to confess to herself that Mrs. Courtland's three little girls were very uninteresting. They were of the respective ages of six, five, and three; and were not ill-looking: but they were dull, spiritless creatures, with fat, soap-smelling cheeks and heavy eyes; lacking all the unexpectedness of childhood, silent and well-behaved. They wore beautiful clothes, and were waited on by two nurses, and a nursery governess, who appeared with them in the dining-room once a day at luncheon. They were seen at no other times, except it was by chance in the grounds, walking with due decorum, under surveillance. No joyous shouts, no toy or picture-book, forgotten on the floor of mamma's boudoir, betrayed the secret of those young lives to the chance visitor. Catherine invaded their sancturary soon after her arrival, and tried to make friends with them. But shyness or apathy rendered this difficult. All the young buds, that needed fostering to expand, seemed frost-bitten. She left the nursery, disheartened.

A change had come over Mrs. Courtland since the previous day: she still coughed a great deal, and looked very ill; but she was no longer hysterical; indeed, the manner and substance of her delivery betokened that she had resolved to impose some restraint upon herself. What she said was of the most superficial kind, and hardly touched anything beyond the current gossip of the day. She seemed cautiously to avoid any ground that could not be tripped lightly over.

Catherine asked herself once or twice during the evening whether she had not, after all, made a mistake in coming here. Between this flighty, flippant little lady and herself there really seemed no link solid enough to stand the strain of close confidential intercourse. Wild as her talk had been on the previous day, it had at least indicated the struggle and suffering of an ill-disciplined mind. But now there seemed no mind at all for anything beyond the last fashion of Worth's, and the chronicle of gay doings in the "Morning Post," among people of whom Catherine knew nothing.

Then Catherine tried the expedient of talking about herself, and

of her happy childhood before her mother's death; how they had lived in the country some distance from Melbourne, and how her mother had first taught her to love books, and had opened her eyes to the manifold beauties of creation. She described all her pet animals, and her many diversions in the country in those early days, and then she said:

"As long as life shall last, I have the memory of that sweet, wholesome time to look back to. I have had but few troubles at present; my mother died when I was but a child, and since I grew up, my dear father's death is the only heavy sorrow I have had. Of course, I must have troubles, sooner or later, like all the rest of the world, but nothing can rob me of my happy childhood—it will always refresh me to look back to it if I am heavy at heart."

"Hasn't some poet said something about there being no greater misery than looking back to past happiness? I am sure I have read it somewhere," said Mrs. Courtland, with an uneasy laugh; "but I never remember anything—only the idea struck me as true."

"It was not of the simple joys of childhood, into which no passion enters, that Dante wrote that. Nothing that parents can give their children in after-life compensates for the want of love and interest and sunshine at the outset of the journey."

"Ah! I suppose so. My own childhood was dreary enough, Heaven knows! I was alone, you know, with a horrid old woman, my grandmother, whom I hated, until I was sent to school, and no one took the slightest trouble about me until I was sixteen, and suddenly turned out to be an heiress. I was petted and pampered enough then. Does it never make you cynical, my dear, to find the importance money gives one? Is there anybody, do you think, would care for one if one was poor?"

"I hope so; but probably the number is smaller than we are led to believe. To return to what we were talking of, however. Does not the loneliness of your own childhood make you anxious that your children should have one as different as possible to look back upon? Does it never strike you that if you were more with them, made their young lives and yours more one, you would open a new world of interest to them, and to yourself too?"

"Oh, as to that, dear, I have told you before that unfortunately I'm not fond of children. I haven't the instinct. It's horrid to say so, I suppose, but it's true. The poor little things have everything in the world they can want, and there are three of them, so they can't be lonely, you see. And what on earth should I do with them here?"

"Well," replied Catherine, with that bluntness which often characterized her utterances, and which the habits of "society" had not yet removed, "you might learn to know them—which you can hardly be said to do—and they might learn to love you, which now it is impossible they can. You complain that your life is empty, that you are left so much alone. And yet you willfully neglect not only a duty, but an element of lasting happiness! By and by you will be sorry for this, believe me."

"Oh! by and by! I never look forward to by and by. I live *au jour le jour*. It's as much as I can do. You are too honest,

dear, to pretend to think that I could really be of any use to the children."

"And why not? Were children ever given to a woman—the most ignorant, the most abject—who could not by watchfulness and tenderness be of use to them? Ah! if you were ruined to-morrow, if you had to work for your own bread and theirs, to wash them and feed them, and teach them yourself, instead of leaving it all to others, it might be better for them, perhaps, and for you too!"

She opened her pretty eyes wide. "Why, my dear, they will have all this world can give them—first-rate masters and governesses, and all that—and what could they learn from me? I'm awfully ignorant, and very foolish. I'm afraid I should do them more harm than good if they were with me. And if—" here she hesitated a moment—"if I were to leave them to-morrow, or to die, I often think it would be a good thing for them. They wouldn't miss me, you know, and by and by—well! by and by, perhaps, they would be glad—"

"How can you talk so!" cried Catherine. "As if all the best masters in England could make up for the loss of a mother, if she does her duty! Oh! when I think of the childless women who would cut off their right hands to possess these blessings, and I see you so indifferent to them, it makes me mad! But you are ill to-night, and talking makes you cough. You must go to bed. To-morrow I hope that you will listen to my wise saws, and act upon them."

The next morning there was a cold east wind, but the sun shone brightly into the breakfast-room where Catherine and Mrs. Courtland met. The little lady's eyes looked more brilliant than ever, and the flush on her cheeks deceived Catherine a moment into the belief that her hostess was almost herself again. She was restless, and coughed much, however, which did not prevent her declaring she would drive her ponies to the meet, some miles distant. Catherine had decided not to hunt from Brookwood, and she now did her best to dissuade Mrs. Courtland from going out on so cold a day. She believed that she had carried her point when the post arrived. It brought one letter for Catherine and one for Mrs. Courtland. Catherine's was not a pleasant communication, and the subject of it engrossed her thoughts, until she was aroused by Mrs. Courtland's starting up from the table and exclaiming, in a tremulous voice, "I am going to put on my things. I can't stay in the house. The ponies will be round in a quarter of an hour. Are you coming?"

"You are not mad enough to drive out in this bitter east wind, coughing as you do? I thought just now you were going to be reasonable and listen to me."

"I've changed my mind, dear," she said, and her voice still shook. "If you knew—I must have air—I am choking, and I want something to distract my thoughts. I can't sit at home any longer, and think—think— Oh! if you only knew, my dear, it is much better I should go out."

She turned and left the room abruptly, and, as she did so, an envelope dropped from the bundle of letters she held. The change in her voice and manner startled Catherine. She would gladly have

remained at home, for the letter she had received demanded long and anxious deliberation. But she could not refuse to accompany Mrs. Courtland; the more so as she might persuade her to return home sooner than she otherwise might do. She picked up the fallen envelope when she left the room, two or three minutes later; and, in doing so, recognized the handwriting. It was Roger Davenport's.

The drive, though its consequences were serious, was uneventful. The wind was piercing, and Catherine had so much to occupy her thoughts, that she leaned back in her furs and did not attempt to talk. Mrs. Courtland too, was silent, until they reached the meet, where the men gathered round her, and she laughed and chattered away, and nodded defiantly to the few ladies who were there, in return for their distant salutations.

"Pray let us go home now. You have never ceased coughing; and even I feel it very cold," said Catherine.

Then the ponies' heads were turned round, their mistress touched them with her whip, and three quarters of an hour later they drew up under the portico of Brookwood.

Catherine went to her own room, and seating herself before the fire, drew out the letter she had received that morning and reread it carefully. It was from Mr. Braggett, her man of business in London, and was marked "Immediate." It had reached Davenport by the second post, shortly after Catherine's departure the previous day, and had been forwarded at once. The contents of the letter were to the effect that the writer was becoming seriously alarmed as to the administration of his client's landed property in Australia, from which there appeared to be no receipts forthcoming. Clearly there was gross mismanagement, if not something worse. The writer had warned Miss Johnstone some weeks since that her house property in Melbourne required to be looked into, that it did not appear to be returning more than a quarter of the income it had formerly yielded. It seemed now that the evil was wider spread and more complicated than the writer had supposed. Mr. Grogan's explanations were not satisfactory; and, without wishing to impugn any one's motives, the writer considered that a strict investigation into the management of the estate should take place at once. How and by whom this should be done, Miss Johnstone herself must decide; or, if she would depute any gentleman in whose judgment she had confidence, to call upon the writer at an appointed hour, he should be glad to confer with her friend upon the subject.

There was no post to London, being Saturday, and Catherine felt that she had ample time to deliberate what course she should pursue. As to the suspicion insinuated against Mr. Grogan, she would not entertain it for a moment. At the same time, for his sake as well as for her own, she felt that a thorough examination of the affairs of which he had the management was necessary. At the end of half an hour, she seized a pen and wrote the following note:—

"DEAR LADY DAVENPORT,—Will you desire the phaeton to come here after church to-morrow. I shall drive over to you for an hour. I want to consult you upon a matter of some importance to me,

and, with your approval, to ask Mr. Holroyd for his help. If you think well, perhaps you will say to him that I am coming, and hope to see him.

"Most sincerely and gratefully yours,

"CATHERINE JOHNSTONE."

Lady Davenport was certainly a little surprised when she read that last line. She had no idea that the young lady's relations with the tutor, which until this last week had appeared more than distant, had warmed into such confidence, and the frankly expressed "hope to see him" which no conventionally-trained girl would write, made the admirable but conventionally-trained matron open her eyes. Of course she gave Philip Holroyd the message, however, as she read Catherine's note at breakfast, and the gleam of pleasure that lit that grave man's countenance was another surprise to one who was too much absorbed by her own cares to be a quick observer of others.

Mrs. Courtland remained in her boudoir writing a long time that afternoon, but when she joined Catherine later it was clear that she was suffering very much from her chest. Her breathing was oppressed, and she coughed almost incessantly! The east wind had done its work. Catherine proposed her sending for the country doctor, but she laughed at the idea. She was accustomed to bad coughs—she knew how to treat herself—she had no faith in apothecaries.

"I think this climate must be too cold for you at this season," said Catherine. "You should go to the south of France for the spring."

She was lying on the sofa, and turned her face away from Catherine, as she murmured in her low hoarse voice,

"Perhaps I shall."

The girl brought a stool close to the sofa. She took the dry feverish hand that lay close to hers, and said,

"Where is Mr. Courtland? Is he in England?"

"No, he is in Hamburg, or somewhere, on business—I don't know where."

"But you surely have his address, to forward his letters?"

"Oh! They are sent to the office. They always know his movements in the city."

"When do you expect him home?"

"I don't know. He'll send a telegram the day before he comes—he seldom writes, you know."

"Whose fault is that? Perhaps not entirely his. Why do you not write and tell him that you are not well, and ask him to come home, and take you abroad somewhere?"

She shook her head. "People must love each other very much to travel alone together. He would be horribly bored—and so should I."

"But he is your husband, the father of your children; all your serious interests in life are identical. If Mr. Courtland would be 'bored,' it must be because you do not try and make yourself pleasant to him, as you do to—other people."

"He ought never to have married—or to have married his grandmother," she said, with irritation.

"Now, listen to me, Mrs. Courtland—" began Catherine.

"Call me Lizzie, will you?"

"Well, then, Lizzie. It seems to me you are willtully flinging away your chance of modified happiness—such happiness as comes from doing one's duty in life—for what? Mr. Courtland may not be your ideal of a husband, but he is very kind to you; he lets you do only too much what you like. He is clever and universally respected. In return for this you treat him coldly when he is at home, and never write to him when he is away. But there are others you are not cold to—others you correspond with—and whom you are always mentally comparing with your husband—you can't deny it. What is to be the end of all this? Have you thought of that?"

It had grown dusk; and lamps had not yet been brought, but she turned her face toward Catherine, and the fire-light fell upon it. By the movement of her lips, more than by the whisper itself, Catherine knew that she said, "Yes, I have."

There was a silence for a minute or two, interrupted only by Mrs. Courtland's distressing cough. Then she sat up, and leaning on her elbow, took both Catherine's hands in hers.

"I am very unhappy—don't be too hard on me, dear. My eyes are not shut to my danger. I know that I am being drawn toward a whirlpool that will drag me down—down—but I have no power to resist. You don't know—I hope you never will—what it is to be held so tight that you can no longer feel, nor reason, except through the will of another!"

What could Catherine say? The evil was far deeper-seated than even she had feared. How powerless was all argument, all entreaty, in a case like this! There was nothing to which she could appeal—neither religion, nor maternal instinct, nor any ingrained sense of moral obligation.

Suddenly she bethought her of a weapon which was ready to her hand.

"Feeling as you do, how could you urge me to marry Roger Davenport, the other day?" she asked.

"I knew it would be far better for him," she murmured in reply—"and—and I saw a door—escape for myself. I thought it might save us both."

"And yet he spoke of marrying me as 'a painful necessity,' did he not? He told you that his heart was still yours, I suppose, though he was forced to propose to me? I feel sure he said this."

Mrs. Courtland colored crimson. A fit of coughing came to her aid at this trying juncture; and the assent, which it was difficult to formulate, was thus left to be implied.

"Could you love any one you despised?" asked Catherine.

"No. I—I suppose not."

"Mr. Davenport is a despicable man. I can prove it to you. I was strongly attracted to him for a short time—I confess it. I was foolish enough to believe that I might gain some influence over him. During that time, he alluded more than once to you—as a chain which he would willingly shake off, but was too weak to do

so. He did not know me when he said that he trusted to my strength to snap this chain. That tore the veil from my eyes—that first showed me what a miserable creature he must be—to speak thus of one woman to another. Since then, every day has made me more and more thankful that my eyes were opened in time. I know him now to be utterly base and dishonorable, and I pity from my heart the wretched woman—whoever she may be—who falls into his clutches!”

The little creature on the sofa had buried her face in her hands, and was sobbing passionately. Catherine felt her advantage. She continued:

“Within this last week he has committed—or attempted to commit—an act, not only despicable by all the laws of honor, but actually amenable to the penal code. Perhaps it may never be known, and I refused to credit it myself, until it was proved. But I am glad—very glad now, to know it. It leaves me no room to doubt what manner of man Roger Davenport is. He has neither principle nor heart. Do not deceive yourself. He is not capable of love. You gratify his vanity, and—you have money. What you said yesterday showed me that you had some perception of the truth. If you were dependent on your husband, Mr. Davenport would not try and compromise you. As it is, if you are divorced, he will marry a rich woman. Is not this horrible, Lizzie? To sacrifice everything, honor, self-respect, your home, your children, everything, for such a man as this! Criminal as such love must always be, think how doubly degrading it is to bestow it on an object you know to be unworthy—a man so corrupt and mercenary, that the only feeling he should inspire, it seems to me, is one of loathing. As long as it was possible to doubt, I doubted. As long as it was possible to make allowances for him—to plead excuse—to believe the best, in short, I tried to do so. Do you think it is wounded pride makes me so bitter now? Indeed, it is not. I have escaped a peril myself—and I am thankful. I want to save you from a yet greater one. You heard from him to-day, you have been writing to him this afternoon. Now all this must come to an end, Lizzie. Tell him there must be no more correspondence between you—no more correspondence, nor meetings. Promise me this, will you?”

The convulsive sobbing had ceased; but a choked gurgling sound rose up from the suffering woman's throat. She raised herself suddenly; a stream of blood spouted from her mouth; and she fell forward on Catherine's shoulder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE surgeon from C—— arrived that evening. He did not take a very serious view of Mrs. Courtland's condition. All that Catherine had done he approved; rest in a horizontal position and the application of ice; beyond this, there was little to be ordered, but some sedative draughts. He urged the necessity of silence: it was essential that the patient should not talk, nor be excited. For the rest, he told Catherine, there was no cause for alarm. The bursting of some small vessel was such a common affair. It was a case

which needed only the most ordinary precaution, to be cured, without leaving any ill effects behind.

Nevertheless, Catherine sat up with her friend all that night. She was tolerably calm, perhaps from exhaustion, perhaps from the effect of the sedatives; she slept a good deal, and in the morning seemed certainly better. She would have talked, but Catherine authoritatively bade her be silent. Catherine did not go to church, and toward noon the cheerful man of medicine returned. He complimented her on her nursing, found his patient going on satisfactorily, cracked a feeble little joke as he left the room, and said he should not pay a visit again till the following day. Catherine asked him whether she might safely leave Mrs. Courtland for two or three hours, and he gave his full sanction to her doing so.

A few hours later Catherine was sitting in Lady Davenport's morning room between her two friends. Lady Davenport was near the fire, with her back to the light; Holroyd, as was his wont, stood on the hearth-rug, facing Catherine, who read aloud the letter she had received the previous day. "And now," she said, as she finished and folded up the document, "what ought I to do? Mr. Braggett I have only known since I came to England. He is very clever, I am told, and certainly has displayed considerable acuteness, apparently, about my complicated affairs. But after all, he may be only making work for himself, and running up law expenses without any necessity for them. I can't leave the whole responsibility of this investigation in his hands. He fancies I am a very good woman of business: he is mistaken. I left Mr. Grogan to arrange all my affairs for me, when I came to England—I saw to nothing myself; which was wrong, for, of course, Mr. Grogan has his hands full, and—"

"If he was under such immense obligations to your father," interrupted Holroyd, "he should have looked to your interests before his own, I should have thought?"

"Perhaps he did; I can't say: all I am sure of is that he has been taken in—that this is in no way his own fault. But, at any rate, the accounts and his explanation of them must be examined by some one besides Mr. Braggett. Do you think I might allow it to stand over till we move to London?"

Catherine looked at Lady Davenport, and the lady gave an interrogative glance across the fire-place, without speaking.

"My opinion," said Philip, decisively, "is that you should become mistress of every detail in this business at once. Until you are so, you can not make up your mind whether it is advisable to send out some one to Melbourne immediately, or to wait for further explanation; and with the reasonable probability of your rents being paid up. There should not be the loss of a day in taking action in such a case."

"My leaving Brookwood for some days is out of the question," was Catherine's quick rejoinder. "The doctor will not allow that Mrs. Courtland's state is one to justify any immediate alarm: but she is certainly very ill: any imprudence might place her life in danger, I feel sure. I have written, unknown to her, by this post to Mr. Courtland, urging his instant return. Unfortunately, he is abroad, and, as we have not his address, the letter must be sent to

his office to be forwarded. All this will cause delay, and until he arrives, I certainly will not leave her."

"Have you no relation or friend in London whom you can trust—a man with a clear head and without any prejudice in the affair, to go into it with your lawyer?" asked Lady Davenport

Catherine shook her head. "My uncle is wool-headed, and as obstinate as a pig, moreover. And friends I have none."

There was a moment's silence; Philip looked grave as ever; but perhaps a latent smile hovered somewhere about his eyes, when he said, slowly:

"There is no one, then, you feel you can trust implicitly, Miss Johnstone?"

She was angry to feel that she was coloring. "If you were able and willing to undertake the trouble, I would trust you, Mr. Holroyd—and feel most grateful. But you have your duties here, and of course it is not to be thought of."

"I accept the confidence in his name," said Lady Davenport with a smile. "We shall all be very glad that he should go up to London for a day in your service. What say you, Mr. Holroyd?"

"I will write to Mr. Braggett to-night, and prepare him for my visit to-morrow. I'll walk over to Brookwood on Tuesday, and tell you the result."

"How kind of you! Now my mind will be at rest, and I can dismiss the subject from my thoughts. It has worried me a good deal, not so much for the sake of the money, but because I feel that I have neglected looking into my affairs, as my dear father would have expected me to do. He left them in an intricate state; without dividing accurately what were mortgages and debts due to the firm, and what were mine. At all events, I never clearly understood myself; and hence all this annoyance, I suppose. He thought I was much cleverer than I am, and actually believed that I should continue to direct the business, with Mr. Grogan as a partner. But I was too glad to come into an arrangement with him, and give up the concern entirely into his hand. I have neither brains nor inclination for such work, which I don't think is a woman's province. Still, I reproach myself with leaving to others what I should have done myself. I knew I had plenty of money; I only thought of quitting Melbourne as soon as I could—and I should so hate to have to go back there!"

She talked on for some time; replying now and then to a question from Lady Davenport (for Philip Holroyd asked none), and giving her auditors a more definite view of her circumstances in relation to Mr. Grogan, and to large Australian property of various kinds possessed by her father, than they had yet had. It appeared that a certain portion only had been realized, and invested in the funds in her name. The remainder, and by far the more valuable part, consisted of houses, wharves, mortgages, and the house of business itself; her interest in which, it seemed, she had compounded for a certain sum annually.

At the end of an hour, she rose and bade Lady Davenport good-by.

"If this poor little woman gets worse, tell me what London doc-

tor I should send for. I have not much confidence in that lively apothecary from C——”

Lady Davenport named and gave the address of a famous physician.

“After all,” she said kindly, “I am glad that you went to Brookwood, as it has turned out.”

“Ah! If you knew. You can not be as glad as I am!”

Philip accompanied Catherine to the carriage; he said to her:

“As soon as the husband comes back, you will return here?”

“Yes—if I don’t think I am wanted. Good-by till Tuesday, Mr. Holroyd. I wonder if you are so kind to me on the same principle that I am trying to be of use to poor Mrs. Courtland, not as a pleasure, but as a duty, almost a necessity? I should be sorry if you thought yourself obliged to help me. I have appealed to you so often.”

“Be good enough not to stop appealing, until you see that the duty is becoming irksome. Until then,” he added, in a low voice, “believe if you will that I, into whose life now but few keen pleasures of action fall, know none like that of serving you. Do not thank me. To feel that I can be of use to you, to know that you turn to me for help, rather than to any one of those who have flattered you, is my reward—I ask no more.”

He grasped her hand, and then turned away, as she stepped into the phaeton and drove off with a flushed cheek and a beating heart. Surely she could not be mistaken? And yet she had never for a moment believed it possible he could care for her deeply and truly, as his words seemed to imply. That he had conquered his antipathy, as she had hers; that he was interested in her welfare, and had a cordial and growing regard for her as a friend; this she had known during the past fortnight; and, inasmuch as he was a man of few protestations, it did not need to be confirmed. But his usual reticence made this parting speech, as Catherine felt, doubly significant. To be loved for herself alone—and by such a man, one whom she could reverence and bow down to, morally and intellectually—this had been her first, and her highest ambition. Then came that weak and ignoble passage, to which she could not look back without shame, when a young Antinous of polished marble surface had bewitched her fancy, and she had succumbed to the lust of the eyes; ignorant, it might almost be said careless, of whether the beautiful statue she was ready to worship was that of a god or a devil. From that peril she had been saved; and perhaps mainly saved by contact with Philip Holroyd, and by a comparison between the two men. She recognized now, that her gradually ripened knowledge of Philip—the awe which he had first inspired melting into admiration and confidence, while yet retaining some tinge of the original sentiment—had more than anything tended to open her eyes as to the nature of Roger Davenport’s fascination. It was purely superficial; even had he not proved to be the miserable creature he was, there was no massive material underlying the pleasurable structure to serve as foundation for enduring happiness. She had, happily for her, encountered another character, whose broad strong lines offered a complete opposition to the tortuous tracery she was vainly endeavoring to follow, to reconcile, and to excuse. Here all was

clear, vigorous, dependable. Her fine intelligence could not fail to regain its balance, when humanity and animalism, worth and unworth, were brought face to face.

It had been the work of a few days only; and until this afternoon she had been unconscious, or, at most, only half-conscious of the revolution in her whole being. The things she had hungered after during the last two years, and some of which she was now enjoying, no longer seemed the ultimate good in existence. Before her eyes there opened a higher, and narrower, and yet more difficult avenue, at the end of which shone out the accomplished work of a wise and noble life. Philip Holroyd had taught her the relative value of many of the common objects of ambition, and the dignity of faithfully discharging any duty, without self-assertion. To be loved by such a man, to be led by his firm hand, and to endow him with all her worldly possessions, seemed almost too great happiness to be possible. She knew his pride—his contempt for a fortune-hunter. But surely, if he cared for her, he would not let her wealth be an insurmountable obstacle between them?

I am afraid I must confess that Catherine forgot Mrs. Courtland completely during her drive back to Brookwood. It was not till she had thrown the reins to the groom, and leaned lightly on the butler's arm, as she jumped to the ground, that her recollection, with a touch of remorse, returned, and she said hurriedly—

"How is Mrs. Courtland now?"

"I'm afraid she is not so well, miss."

Catherine ran up stairs, without waiting to hear more, and entered the room softly. Two or three maids were gathered round the bed where the little woman lay, white and still, with her large blue eyes distended. There had been another attack of hemorrhage, caused, as Catherine felt sure, by the poor foolish creature's disobedience of the doctor's orders. She had called for pen and ink, and had insisted, in Catherine's absence on writing a letter, which now lay on the table, ready to be posted. Catherine hardly required to glance at the superscription, to know to whom it was addressed. She felt too much grieved and alarmed to waste time in speculation as to what it contained. She whispered to one of the maids to find her a telegram-form; then she sat down by the bed, and placed her warm hand upon the small bloodless one that lay upon the coverlid.

Lizzie Courtland tried to speak, but Catherine stopped her mouth; then, seeing the look of distress in the large blue eyes, she leaned down till her face was close to the white one on the pillow, and she caught the words faintly whispered,

"Don't keep the letter back—I have done—what you told me."

Catherine kissed her. "Your mind will be happier now, Lizzie, and you must keep yourself as calm as possible; everything, you know, depends on that."

She wrote a telegram to the London physician, and then returned to watch by the bedside, where she remained throughout the night. The sufferer did not close her eyes; it was distressing to watch her feverish restlessness, to listen to her harrowing cough and her oppressed breathing, and to find all remedies powerless to relieve her. Catherine had little experience of illness; beyond following implicitly the country doctor's directions, she did nothing, waiting im-

patiently for the first train from London on Monday, which she hoped would bring the physician.

It was a lovely morning; and Catherine, as she sat at breakfast in the boudoir, which was just below, and led by a private staircase from Mrs. Courtland's room—here her patient had at last, from sheer exhaustion, fallen asleep—felt a keen desire to breathe the fresh air, for five minutes, in the garden. She had not closed her eyes all night; her nerves needed some refreshment. She observed a plate-glass door which gave access to the terrace, and she was trying to open it as the butler entered the room.

"That door is locked, miss."

"Can't it be opened?"

"No, miss—there's only two keys—it's a Bramah lock. Mr. Courtland keeps one key and Mrs. Courtland the other."

"No matter—I can go round to the terrace by the front door"—and she ran out without her hat, and inhaled a draught of invigorating frosty air, before returning to the sick-room. Mrs. Courtland woke up more feverish; and it seemed to Catherine that she was weaker; her voice was almost inaudible.

An hour later the physician arrived. He was a straightforward man, of clear insight, and with a conscientious avoidance of deception, which caused him to be unpopular. After a careful examination of his patient, he beckoned Catherine out of the room.

"I can catch the up train at noon, Miss Johnstone, and my remaining here would be useless. I am sorry to say I can do nothing for your friend. It is congestion of the lungs, which might, perhaps, have been arrested a day or two ago, but she has caught cold upon cold, and it is now gone too far, I fear, for medical skill to be of any avail."

"Do you mean that she is in immediate danger?"

"She may live a few days—but I doubt her lasting the week. I never knew a more rapid case. You tell me she was driving out on Saturday, when she certainly ought to have been in her bed, poor lady. Where is Mr. Courtland?"

"He is abroad. I wrote to him yesterday, but unfortunately my letter had to be forwarded from London, as we don't know his address."

"He should be telegraphed for at once, if you wish him to arrive in time to see his wife alive."

Catherine felt stunned. "Is there no hope? Is there nothing to be done?" She asked these questions, as it seemed to her, mechanically.

He shook his head. "She can never recover. There is nothing to be done, but to keep her tranquil—so that her end may be peaceful. She is very restless. Has she anything on her mind? She gives me that impression. If so, she had better see a clergyman."

"I will ask her. I suppose she should be prepared for the great change. And her poor little children—she must see them! It seems like a dream. I cannot realize it. She belonged so essentially to this world! Even since she has been ill, the idea of her dying *at once* never occurred to me. The suddenness is very awful." And Catherine sat down, and covered her face with her hands.

That evening Catherine wrote, and sent the following note to Davenport by a groom.

“DEAR MR. HOLROYD,—After all, I am obliged to write and ask you not to come here to-morrow, for I could not see you. All my time and thoughts are painfully occupied; and will be so, until Mr. Courtland’s return. Alas! the verdict has been pronounced. She is dying—it is only a question of days. You will understand that I can have but one thought now—how to comfort and sustain this poor soul’s last struggle with mortality—to make the passage from this troubled life of hers to a better one more easy and hopeful. I could have no heart nor capacity to enter upon the business which you have kindly undertaken to examine in my behalf. It can not be so pressing, but that it will keep for a few days.

“Oh! Mr. Holroyd, believe me, my experience here—the knowledge I have bought with sorrowful sympathy—will not be thrown away. If one can not see a foolish little moth burn its wings in a candle without pain, the sight of a human being whose thoughtless butterfly career is suddenly brought to a close, and mainly by its own reckless folly, surely should read a solemn lesson to us all.

“You will think it strange, perhaps, that I feel so grieved for this little creature, whom I have known so short a time, and with whom I had so few sympathies in common. But it is so; I am heartily grieved; more so, I think, than if her life had been a wise and blameless one. To be cut off so suddenly, just as her eyes, poor soul! were being opened to the truth—

“I am interrupted.

“Yours most faithfully,

“CATHERINE JOHNSTONE.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE following day Catherine received a telegram from Berlin. Mr. Courtland hoped to be at home either on Wednesday night or Thursday morning. It was possible that he might not reach London in time to catch the last train to Brook on Wednesday, but the dog-cart was to be sent to the station on the chance.

And, meantime, the anxious, hopeless hours wore wearily away. Catherine had not taken off her clothes for three nights. She had scarcely slept; and when Wednesday night arrived, the girl felt very tired. But still she would not give in. A few more hours, at furthest, and the husband—the man whose place it was to watch beside that bed—he must be here. The maids were thoroughly worn out. She sent them away early in the evening to obtain some hours’ sleep; while she remained alone. At one o’clock they were to be roused, and to relieve guard in the sick-room.

It was past eleven o’clock on Wednesday night, and she sat watching beside Mrs. Courtland’s bed. The house was silent; a couple of men waited up for their master, but most of the servants were gone to bed. Catherine looked worn and pale under the lamp light, with her eyes distended, fixed upon the bed; though now and again she turned them quickly to right or left, with “a listening fear in her

regard," at any distant sounds. Her nerves were strung to the uttermost. Would the husband arrive to-night? Would he be in time to see his wife and to forgive her? She was waiting anxiously to hear the carriage drive up the approach, on the chance of its bringing Mr. Courtland.

It struck twelve; and the last train was due at Brook soon after eleven. Unless he took a "special," then, it was clear he would not come to-night. A dog in the stable-yard barked once or twice; then all was still again. She shivered as she rose, and walked to the window, where the shutters were not closed, drew the heavy curtain aside, and looked out. The moon, in the last quarter, showed just above the elms, sending a faint uncertain light among the shrubs in the garden below.

And now, at last, she heard the sound of wheels upon the gravel-drive. She knew it was the dog-cart returned from the station. She could not distinguish it, but the sound told her it was going toward the stable-yard, and not approaching the hall-door. He had not come then! He would probably not come before to-morrow morning! With a weary sigh of disappointment, she sat down before the fire. What a strange position was hers! Beside the death-bed of a woman whom she scarcely knew, and yet whose only friend she seemed to be! How little she had looked forward to this when she had seen her, for the first time, but a few weeks since!

* * * * *

Catherine had been sitting for more than an hour in a large arm-chair between the fire-place and the heavily draped bed where Mrs. Courtland lay motionless. So motionless, that it was only when, bending over the white face on which the dark-fringed lids rested, one caught the feeble breath of life, that the watcher could feel sure that this calm was that of sleep and not of death.

Twice or thrice in the hour the girl had so bent over the pillow and sat down again, thankful that the blessing of untroubled sleep had fallen upon the dying woman. Then, at last, she began to feel very weary. The excitement of suspense had hitherto sustained her, but flesh is weak. Mrs. Courtland slept on; there was nothing to be done; and, with no demand for mental or physical exertion, it was not surprising that the girl fell into an uneasy doze, which not even her anxiety could ward off, though it prevented anything like sound sleep.

Had she been awake a quarter of an hour later she would have been startled by the sound of the small garden door just below the window being stealthily opened and shut, and a man's footstep treading softly the winding stair that led to this bedroom. As it was, she only sprung to her feet when the handle of the door was turned, and a man—she could not distinguish whom in the dim light—slowly entered. She made a step forward, with the conviction that it was Mr. Courtland. Then she stopped short, rooted to the spot.

She recognized Roger Davenport.

He said nothing for nearly a minute; he, too, stood transfixed, while Catherine's heart beat so fast in her dismay and bewilderment that she felt as if she were choking.

"How dare you force your way in here?" she murmured at last,

He held up a key. "I did not *force* my way in."

"Do you not know—"

"That she is ill? Yes. That is why I am here."

"She is dying. Did you not get her letter? This is no place for you. Mr. Courtland may be here at any moment."

This was said in a rapid whisper. For all reply the young man drew nearer the bed. The face of her who lay there was shadowed by the curtain. Did he doubt the truth of Catherine's words? He drew it aside, and the lamp-light fell upon the pillow, where the small child-like head reposed. He started back. On those wax-like features there was an untroubled peace which he had never seen before—a calm beyond that of sleep.

Catherine, too, saw the change that had come there within the last half hour. She sprang forward with a low, inarticulate cry and bent over the pillow. Yes, it was indeed so. While she had been sleeping, the poor, weary spirit had passed away from its frail tenement without a struggle.

She knelt down by the bed and burst into tears.

"Thank God! she is at rest. Beyond the reach of temptation and sorrow now."

He did not speak, he did not utter a sound; and when she rose she found that he was leaning against the wall, with his head between his hands, and his back toward her. There was a convulsive movement of his shoulders once or twice. This was the only indication that the blow had, for the moment, at all events, shaken him deeply.

Catherine did not break the silence again for some minutes. At length she said, in a low voice:

"Mr. Davenport, you must go. You would not do her further injury? The misery you wrought here is perhaps only fully known to me. May God forgive you!"

He lifted his head. His face was white as marble. His brow, generally unruffled, was knit, and the wide-open blue eyes had a look akin to ferocity in them. He took the lamp which she handed to him, and passed out without a word.

She heard his step descend the stair, the garden door unlocked and locked again.

Then she knelt down by the bed and prayed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CATHERINE was by nature strong, and her nervous energy was great, but the scenes she had gone through during the last few days, and the fatigue she had endured, told upon her when the necessity for exertion was past. After Mr. Courtland's return the following morning, she left Brookwood at once. On her arrival at Davenport, she went to her room, where Lady Davenport came to her, and she did not leave it that day or the next.

But though unequal to the task of keeping up the ball of indifferent talk with Sir Norman, or with Lady Retford, she wished strongly to see Philip Holroyd, and, indeed, felt it was right she should do so, with as little delay as possible.

On the afternoon of the second day—it was Friday—she was alone in her own sitting-room, with her hands lying listlessly before her, when Lady Davenport entered.

“How is your head now, my dear?”

“Better, thank you. I am well enough, I think, to talk about business, and I feel I ought to see Mr. Holroyd. Would you ask him to come to me, by and by? Has he told you what he did on Monday?”

“Yes; but he shall tell his own story. I will bring him up here when he comes in. You will not come down to dinner, of course?”

“No—it is very stupid—but I feel as if I could not sit by and listen to jokes and gossip, just yet—as if I should be obliged to run out of the room. I see her face, poor little thing! as it was just before she died, forever before me; when she turned to me and said, in her broken voice, ‘I have been very wicked, dear—do you think I can be forgiven?’ It has made me feel years older than I did when I went to Brookwood—witnessing that death-bed.”

“I quite understand that, my dear; and there is no use in forcing yourself to come down-stairs, and take part in general conversation, until you feel better disposed to do so. At the same time, I think you are right to see Mr. Holroyd, and hear what he has to tell you, as the matter is one of real importance; and it is as well now that your thoughts should be directed to some other subject than the melancholy one which has employed you for the last week.”

Lady Davenport returned toward dusk, bringing Philip Holroyd with her.

Catherine did not attempt to rise. There was still a lassitude about her, very unlike her ordinary demeanor. She held out her hand in silence. He took it, and then, as usual, went and stood by the fire. It was a peculiarity that he rarely sat down, when he spoke on what interested him. Lady Davenport did not leave the room. She had debated in her own mind whether she should do so; inasmuch, however, as Catherine had originally consulted her on this matter, and that Philip had not only spoken openly to her since his return from London, but that they had deliberated long and anxiously together upon it, she decided to remain. There could be no indiscretion in this: it would deprive the interview of too particular a character, should Lady Retford or the servants be minded to gossip; and it was possible she might be of some use to Catherine.

“I went to London on Monday,” began Holroyd, “and I spent a couple of hours with Mr. Braggett. I read all Mr. Grogan’s letters: I examined all the accounts he has sent over: and, after a long conversation with Mr. Braggett, I came to the conclusion that there was unquestionably something wrong—something beyond mere carelessness in the administration of your affairs. Here are a few plain facts and figures which I have written down, that you might more clearly understand the exact position of things.”

He drew some papers from his pocket, and read one, a summary of the receipts, and Mr. Grogan’s explanation of the deficiencies, during the past six months: commenting on these statements in his terse and lucid manner as he went along.

But Catherine’s unconquerable loyalty was proof against all damaging deductions. When he had done, she said quietly:

"I am sure Mr. Grogan would make it all quite clear, if one could talk to him. He has so much more on his hands than he can possibly get through, that his letters are confused."

"Yes—they are confused," returned Philip, gently; and Lady Davenport could not fail to observe the difference in his tone, from that in which he had spoken to her of Mr. Grogan's "confusion." He was solicitous to spare Catherine as much pain as possible. The loss of the money would be as nothing to that warm, generous nature, compared to the discovery of ingratitude and treachery, where she had placed unbounded trust.

"They are confused," he continued, "and that brings me to the question which you will have to consider, and decide upon, within the next few days. There is a steamer bound for Melbourne at the end of the month. Some one should, certainly, go out, empowered by you to sift this complicated business thoroughly. It is impossible to do so at a distance—I quite agree with Mr. Braggett on that point."

"Whom am I to send? Did he suggest any one?"

"No. He said it must be some one whom you could implicitly trust. He need not be a lawyer—but he must be a good accountant—a man of judgment—shrewd, and not easily to be taken in."

"I know no such person."

There was a pause. Lady Davenport coughed. Philip shifted the weight of his body from one foot to the other, and finally leaned back against the mantel-piece. Then he said quietly, as though he were making an every-day proposition,

"Will you trust *me*? Lady Davenport and I have had some conversation on this subject. Malcolm, it is now decided, is to go to Germany very soon: I am, therefore, free to be of use to you, if you will accept my services."

Catherine's color rose and went again; but words did not come readily to her lips. It was Lady Davenport who said,

"I think you will be very fortunate, my dear, in having such an agent. You can not do better than accept Mr. Holroyd's offer."

"I appreciate it very much—but—"

Here she stopped short, and seemed confused. A hesitation so utterly opposed to her ordinary bearing was interpreted by Lady Davenport as evidence of Catherine's physical weakness and unfitness to support the fatigue of a business discussion, and she was not surprised when the girl added, a moment later,

"It is very kind of you—so kind that I can not decide to accept your offer—at once. I must think over this—I will talk to you to-morrow, or next day. At present, I feel dazed—and—and unable to say anything."

Holroyd took one or two quick strides across the room. The effort to speak unconcernedly was apparent, as he said, a moment later,

"When your decision is made, send for me. But don't look on it as any wonderful sacrifice on my part. I am giving up nothing in going out to Melbourne for a few months, and the sea-voyage and change will be very pleasant. I hope you'll let me go for you."

He said no more, but shook her hand, and left the room quickly.

When he was gone Catherine rose and approached Lady Daven-

port. It was evident she was greatly moved. The hand which she leaned upon the table trembled; and when she spoke, the voice was husky and unsteady.

"Tell me, you know him so well, tell me, is it more than chivalry that—that prompts Mr. Holroyd to make this offer? Am I deceiving myself? Is it possible that he cares for me, do you think?"

Lady Davenport was rarely taken aback. She had trained herself to meet most emergencies with self-possession and readiness of rejoinder. But this unexpected demand taxed her candor and her loyalty to Holroyd alike severely. He had not made her his confidante, it was true, but during those long conversations they had had together in the past week it was impossible that her eyes should not have been opened to the real state of the man's heart. The revelation distressed her. She did not for a moment believe that the girl who had shown such determination to acquire a social standing, who, generous and warm-hearted as she had proved herself to be, leaned eagerly toward all that the world had to offer which was bright and gay, would ever consent to link her fate with that of a man who had none of those things which apparently she most prized. That Catherine valued his character, and liked his society, in a way—so much Lady Davenport now knew, but she also knew that the girl was not a flirt. It would distress her to encourage, or appear to encourage, an attachment she could not return. Holroyd would jealously guard his secret: was she, his friend, justified in betraying it? More especially if the betrayal should lead, as it very probably would, to Catherine's rejection of his valuable aid.

"I only feel certain," she said at last, "that he very sincerely desires to help you, and that, whatever his feelings may be, you will never be troubled by an avowal of them. He is too noble-minded to think that rendering you this service will give him any special claim to your regard. Mr. Holroyd is the most disinterested man I ever knew."

"Disinterested? You mean that he would never seek me for my money, and you doubt the possibility of his really caring for me?"

Brought to bay thus, Lady Davenport replied,

"Do not fall into the error of so many women of fortune, my dear, and torture yourself by the belief that no one can love you for yourself alone. Mr. Holroyd takes a deep interest in you, I am sure; but no doubt he feels that between your position and his, there is such a gulf, that to try and win your affections would not be creditable to him. He offers to do you a great service, but it is one that will separate you for some time; you can therefore accept it conscientiously, and without the fear of its fostering any delusion on his part."

Catherine sighed heavily, and Lady Davenport's astonishment was great when the girl said, with a little hesitation,

"Then, supposing he cared for me—my unfortunate riches would prove an insurmountable obstacle to his confessing it? Don't you think I am to be pitied? Would it not be better for me to lose all my Melbourne property, if by doing so I could gain the assurance that such a man loved me—that is, of course, if I cared for him sufficiently to marry him?"

Lady Davenport's pale face was turned in blank wonderment on Catherine. She laid her hand gently on her arm,

"Have you well weighed the force of your words? Have you reflected on what such a marriage implies? Mr. Holroyd's thoughts, and habits of life, his aims and pleasures, are all opposed to yours, which you would have to renounce, for certainly he would not change his. He is seventeen years your senior, and he is a grave man, even for his years. You have been with us only three months, but during that time your inclination has led you to seek for all that is gay and amusing, young and light-hearted. Your vanity, perhaps, is flattered at the idea of winning the heart of so rare and noble a character. Do not deceive yourself; it would be cruel to both. Marriage, my dear," she added, taking the girl's hand with a tenderness unusual in her, "is too solemn a responsibility to be undertaken for a mere fancy. Of course, if your feeling was really a deep and serious one, that had stood the test of time, it would be very different; I should look on your happiness as assured. But it is not so. Absence, and your mixing in London society will remove this impression, and therefore I still more strongly urge your acceptance of Mr. Holroyd's services."

"Thank you, I will think over it," said Catherine. "No one can understand what I feel, it is useless to try and explain. And no one can decide, therefore, what I should do, but myself."

CHAPTER XXVI.

Two days passed, and Catherine did not come down-stairs, neither did she send for Philip Holroyd.

Lady Davenport saw but little of him; they had no private interview. He was restless, preoccupied, almost surly, Malcolm thought. He compared him to Ulysses. His aunt said, for her part, she thought he was more like Cerberus. As to that absurd young woman shutting herself up in this way, upstairs, because a horrid creature whom she had known only a few weeks was dead, she really had no patience with such affectation. And it was so very damaging to her. Really, Lady Davenport should tell her so. But Lady Davenport did not. She visited Catherine several times a day, but she made no effort to bring her down-stairs. Nor did they speak again upon the subject uppermost in the thoughts of one, at least, if not of both.

On Sunday evening she announced that she should attend Mrs. Courtland's funeral the following day. Lady Davenport tried gently to dissuade her from this unusual step, but the girl was resolute.

"I am perfectly well now—perfectly well and strong—and I wish to follow that poor little woman to her last rest for many reasons. I owe her a debt of gratitude, though you would not think it, and in her grave, to-morrow, I feel as if much of the folly of my past would be buried, and that my mind would become calmer and steadier to see how I ought to act."

After that, Lady Davenport said no more.

The brougham came round at ten o'clock the next morning, and Catherine, looking pale in her black dress, but resolute and com-

posed, stepped into it and drove off. Sir Norman's own carriage followed. He had expressed his readiness to accompany Catherine, but she had declined the offer, and he had decided that to send his empty carriage was all that was necessary "as a civility."

The funeral was not emotional. To all appearance a colder procession, in which the pomp and pride of mourning did duty for natural feeling, had rarely wound its way up that village churchyard. But there was one, at least, to whom the ceremony spoke feelingly: one to whom the pathos of those farewell words, and the solemnity of the occasion, had a special significance. She joined most heartily in thanksgiving to God, that it had pleased Him "to deliver this our sister out of the miseries of this sinful world;" the well-springs of healthy life had been poisoned for that poor soul; there was no saving refuge but this. And she, Catherine, had put her lips to that poison. The world had lured her; she had been saved, as by a miracle, from the baneful fascination of one whom she now saw in his true colors—one who would have dragged her down into the depths of a despair almost as fatal as that which had seized this unhappy victim of his. How empty of all true happiness seemed the life to which she had looked forward but a few weeks back! She thought of poor Lizzie Courtland in her ball-dress, surrounded by admirers. She thought of her own pleasurable wonder and gratification at her "success." What had success done for either of them? There lay the young wife and mother, who had sacrificed duty, reputation, peace of mind, to this raging thirst for admiration and excitement, dead at the age of twenty-seven. And for herself had not these three months, or rather, the last few days, taught her that there was a possible happiness far beyond any that mere amusement could bestow, or social triumph achieve? Her heart had suddenly awoke: she now saw things as she had never seen them before, by reason of the love which fired and lit up her life. She had hesitated, she had drawn back, almost in anger with herself, until the suspicion had grown into something like a joyous certainty, that Philip Holroyd cared for her. Lady Davenport's manner, even more than her words, had strengthened this; and the last two days had been passed by Catherine in rigorous self-questioning, as to how she should act at this juncture.

It may seem strange that her resolution should have been affected by the ceremony at which she now assisted; but it is difficult to account for the workings of the human heart. When she listened to that beautiful service, and thought of the wasted young life which, with a purifying love and guidance, might have been so different, two paths in her own future appeared distinctly before her: one, hard, unlovely, and beset with danger; the other leading up, up, into a higher and clearer atmosphere, and with but one obstacle to be surmounted in the foreground—pride.

Upon her return home, she appeared at luncheon, for the first time. Sir Norman was out, but Lady Retford was present, and could not repress her curiosity (if, indeed, she made any effort to do so), to learn how many of the "county families" had sent their carriages to the funereal, and if any members of them had attended it in person. Catherine's cold reply, that she had looked at no one, and was ignorant as to who had been present, elicited the remark

from Lady Retford afterward, that she was "a dull young woman, after all, who will never make her way in the world—she has no observation."

"I am going to the conservatory; will you come there presently?" Catherine said in a low voice to Philip, as they left the room.

It was an old-fashioned orangery, rather than a conservatory, which had been neglected for years, and over the walls and roof of which the creepers had been allowed to spread and hang down in unpruned luxuriance. There was a little niche presided over by a plaster statue of a fawn, under which stood a bench, which was a favorite seat of Catherine's. On wet days she often brought a book here, and it was here she awaited Philip. She had only been there a few minutes when his military step came ringing along the stone floor, and he stood before her.

"Have you decided to let me help you?" he said at once, bending his clear, scrutinizing eyes upon her. "You don't know how anxious, how uneasy, I have been these two days past. But I resolved to wait, and abide your decision."

"Thank you for that. Please sit down. It makes it more difficult for me to tell you what I want, if you stand. I like to hear you say you have been anxious—it gives me courage to speak—and it is hard to say what I want. It has taken me all this time to make up my mind that I will do so, at whatever cost."

"You know that I am your friend—I hope I have proved that," he said in a low voice, "and to a friend one should be able to speak openly, without fear of being misunderstood."

"What I would say then is this. The service you wish to render me is one which I must regard in one of two ways—either as a pure matter of business—" He winced, and made a quick movement with his hand, "—in which light I know you would never regard it—or as an obligation, which our relative positions do not justify my laying myself under. I have known you so short a time, scarcely three weeks, though we have lived under the same roof for three months. But you disliked me, at first, you know, as much as I did you. And now, what is your feeling?" she continued, hurriedly and with a heightened color. "You have been most kind, most helpful to me during these weeks; you have expressed an interest in—my welfare, which perhaps I have misunderstood. If so, I ask you to undeceive me now. If you are prompted by no stronger feeling than a chivalrous desire to befriend me, I must decline to accept this sacrifice."

A cloud passed over the man's resolute face.

"Why do you ask me? What can my feelings signify to you? They shall never be thrust upon you; nor shall the world ever know them. It pleases me to do something for you—can't you let it be so?"

"No, I can not, I will not."

Listen to me. You spoke of our 'relative positions' just now. Are they not such as ought to enable me to offer you my services without risk of misapprehension? You are a girl, beginning life, full of curiosity, enthusiasm, and love of pleasure. The world is all before you, and will do its best to spoil you; though in that, I hope and believe, it will never succeed. You will meet men of

talent, men of great station, who will lay these gifts at your feet. Among them your heart can scarcely fail to select one. Now what am I? A hard-working man of middle age, without distinction of any kind to bestow. The idea of my aspiring to be more than your friend would be preposterous. Circumstances have thrown us together, and you have deeply interested me. Let a few months of my life be given to your service. That is all I ask."

She trembled, and it seemed as if the beating of her heart would choke her.

"What if I told you that the idea does not seem to me preposterous! Would your pride still stand in the way?"

"It is not my pride, though, perhaps, I have too much of it," he replied slowly. "If you were some years older, if you had seen more of the world, if I felt a conviction that I could make you happy, my pride should not stand in my way; I should be indifferent what the world might say of me. But not so now. You know but little of me; you know but little of the 'society' you have sought so eagerly, you are ignorant of what it is you want in life; you have quick sensibilities, a generous nature. It would be despicable of me to work upon these, to profit by the confidence you have placed in me, by trying to make you believe that I am worthier of you in any way than heaps of younger men—men who are more suited to you in other respects. I am not so. I have knocked about the world, and have few illusions left. I am skeptical, not easily imposed upon. I suffered once through a woman, and I said I would never trust one again. When you came here, my life had, for so long, been that of a recluse, that I avoided you. I said to myself, you were a girl with whom I could have nothing in common, a rich young woman who had no other object or interest in life than to be introduced into fashionable society. Little by little, I learned my mistake. I watched you narrowly; and I pitied you; then pity grew into deep interest, and interest into—well, no matter. Any man with eyes, and heart, and brains, would feel as I have done, and would say, as I do, 'Let me be your friend. Let me serve you. I have no thought or hope beyond that.'"

Catherine leaned her head upon her hand, and plucked at the black fringes of her dress, without raising her eyes.

"I see what is in your mind," she said at last, "and I ought not to feel surprised. You think, when I ask you to rule my destiny (for am I not doing so?) that I probably do not know my own mind, or heart, now, a bit better than I did a few weeks since, when I was under the spell of Roger Davenport's fascination. You are wrong. What I felt for him had no strong root—it could not have lived. Though I was dazzled for a time, I saw his shallowness; but I tried to make excuses for him, tried to fancy that my influence would change and redeem his life. What folly! My struggle as to you has been all the other way. I have cordially disliked you; I have called you a bear, and all manner of names, and yet I never doubted your strength, and truth, and reliability. The proof of it was that I went to you in difficulty, and the conviction of what you are has grown on me every day since then. I am obstinate, you know that, for I have not followed your advice, when I thought I saw my duty clear-

ly before me. Well! my obstinacy has its good side. When I once make up my mind I never change. You may go to Melbourne, you may be absent for years; I shall never change now."

In his unselfish devotion to the girl for whom he was ready to lay down his life, the man had resolved to repress all manifestation of his passion; and he was a strong man, not easily moved from his purpose. But he would have been more than human had he resisted this appeal. He seized the hand that lay near his, and pressed it to his lips; but for a moment or two he could not speak. His thoughts were in a tumult, his scheme of action shattered, like some pale phantom of the mist before the rosy flood of sunrise.

"If it indeed be so," he said in a low voice—"if, a year hence, when I return from Melbourne, you say what you say now, nothing shall part us, Catherine, *nothing*. But, remember, you are free as air. You will see, in the interim, a great deal more of the world than you have yet done. You will be courted by many; and among them, it is hardly likely that there will not be one who will prove to you how mistaken you have been in fancying I was the man 'to rule your destiny'—as you call it. Should this happen, as I foresee is probable, don't let it pain you too much. Remember that I am prepared—that I expect *nothing*."

"Very well," she returned, with a smile that shone through the tears that now rained down her cheeks. "I will see as much as I can of the world while you are away, to prove to you that I am not making a choice with my *eyes shut*."

'There is not much more to be told.

Philip Holroyd sailed for Melbourne, and Catherine went to London with the Davenports. For six months she followed the routine of a popular girl's life, riding every morning with Sir Norman in the Row, where she was joined by two or three of her admirers; driving with Lady Davenport in the afternoon; dining out, or adding a unit to some crowd most nights. She did not lose her capacity for general enjoyment; she did not appear absent, or even indifferent, in society. She talked much, and listened eagerly; she produced the effect of being entertained and contented. But there was no one whose image, when she was alone, rose up to displace, even for a moment, the recollection of him who had crossed the ocean in her service.

By a secret compact with his honor, as he understood that term, he confined his letters almost wholly to details of the business which had taken him to Melbourne. It threatened to be protracted. As he had anticipated, Grogan proved to be a scoundrel, but so astute a one, that it would have been very difficult to adduce legal proof of his malpractices, even had Catherine been willing that he should be prosecuted. But this she positively forbade. She preferred losing a considerable amount to ruining the man whose fortune her father had made, and in whom he had placed implicit trust. Philip insisted, however, that if Grogan was to be permitted to retain his ill-gotten gains, it was at least necessary that Catherine should no longer have an interest in the business; and from it, in consequence, the very large sum which represented her share was withdrawn. Grogan dared not expostulate; he was shifty and plausible to the last; and it

needed a man of Holroyd's penetration and resolute will to deal with him. But he was not to be deterred from inflicting the punishment which prudence and justice alike demanded: and that blow proved fatal to the house. In the spring of this year the firm of Grogan & Co. was proclaimed bankrupt.

Philip was in Australia very nearly a year. There was a great deal to be done even after the investigation—which resulted in all the affairs being taken out of Grogan's hands—was over. The judicious reinvestment of capital, the sale of certain lands—which had hitherto been badly let, and still more badly paid for—legal technicalities, the selection of agents, and precautionary measures against future corruption; by such anxious and laborious work, the months—those months which Catherine was giving apparently to amusement and to nothing else—were fully fed for Holroyd.

At the end of the season Lady Davenport was far from well, and Catherine, in pursuance of Dr. Hermann Weber's advice, insisted on going to Homburg with her friend. She did not invite Sir Norman to accompany her—plenty of country houses were open to him during the autumn; and the ladies enjoyed a tour in Germany and Switzerland during three months in complete independence. They visited Malcolm at Dresden, and found him long-haired, and with a braided coat, smoking a china pipe, which bore the effigy of Gretchen. Catherine thought it a healthy sign. He was grown, and seemed to be working hard, and to be happy. His German sentimentalism was more robust than his æsthetic affectation. On the whole, his mother was satisfied.

On the other hand, a chance meeting with Roger at Saxon-les-Bains hung like a cloud over their homeward journey. He had been living abroad all these months, no one could exactly say how or where; writing to his mother from time to time, but giving as little information about himself and his concerns as possible. Here, at Saxon, his haggard face, his disreputable associates, all told their tale. Lady Davenport and Catherine remained there only one day: they could do no good, and to watch the deterioration in her son was agonizing to the poor mother.

It was but a few weeks after their return to Davenport that the news of his sudden death reached them. The circumstances of it were never revealed—at least to Lady Davenport; but Lady Retford could not refrain from telling Catherine, in the strictest confidence, that it was whispered her nephew had destroyed himself.

This happened at the beginning of November. In the letter Catherine wrote to Philip shortly after this, she said,

“I shall now, of course, be in retirement for the whole winter. No one will come to this house of mourning; and my own inclinations, as well as my affection for Lady Davenport, will prevent my leaving her, though I have many invitations. During the last nine months, however, I have led a sufficiently mundane life, I hope, to satisfy your scruples. During that time I find that I have been to forty-three dinner-parties, to upward of seventy drums and concerts, and to more than twenty balls! I have visited two foreign capitals, and a fashionable watering-place. I have dined for three months at a table d'hôte. I have conversed with old men and young

ones, diplomatists and politicians, military heroes, philanthropists, and literary notabilities. Many of them were *very* civil to me. Some I found bores; some amused me; some even interested me a little: none have I any strong desire to see again. Does this satisfy you? Is this sufficient probation? Must I confess that I count the days more eagerly than ever till your return? That I long with an intense longing to hear the deep voice that is like none other in my ears? To feel the touch of that large strong hand laid tenderly on mine once more? Come back! Do not let those horrid affairs keep you from me any longer. Oh! come back quickly!"

And so it was, that in May last, they were married.

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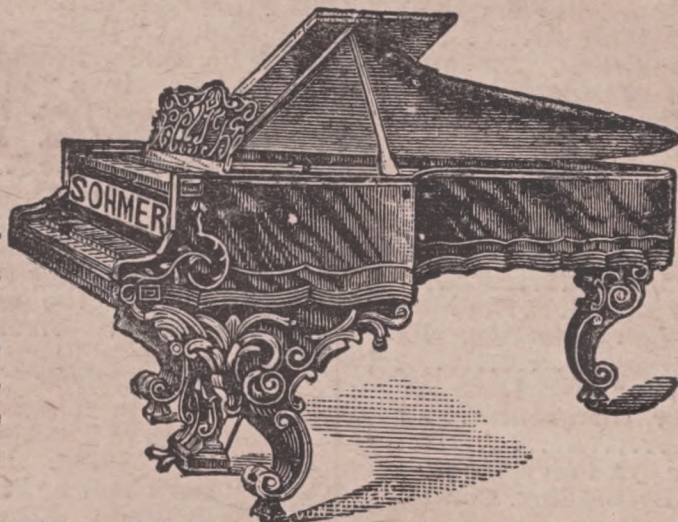
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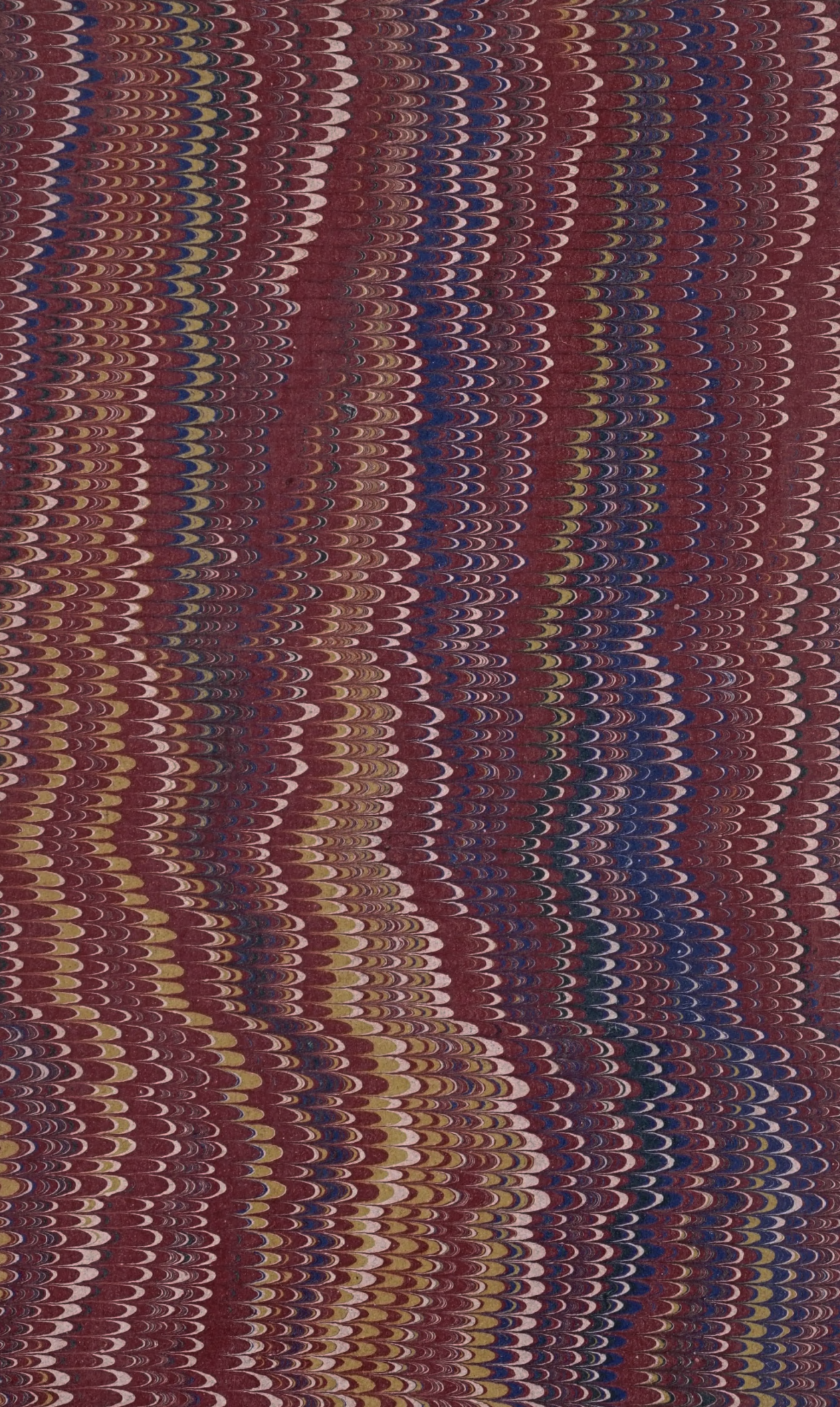


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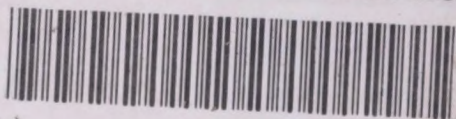
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